

RICE UNIVERSITY

**Ignorance and Moral Responsibility:
A Quality of Will Approach**

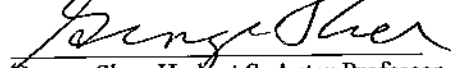
by

Philip Robichaud

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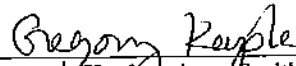
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ABSTRACT

Ignorance and Moral Responsibility: A Quality of Will Approach

By Philip Robichaud

My central aim in the dissertation is to defend an account of the epistemic condition of moral responsibility that distinguishes culpable ignorance from non-culpable ignorance. The view that I defend is that ignorance is culpable just when an agent flouts or ignores moral reasons that underlie her epistemic norms or obligations. This view is a quality-of-will theory of moral responsibility that emphasizes the agent's reasons-responsiveness. It holds that only relevant epistemic obligations are those that require acts of investigation or reflection.

In the dissertation, I examine extant theories of culpable ignorance and suggest that they all fall short in some important respect. Then, I propose and defend an account in which epistemic norms play a leading role. I analyze the nature of epistemic norms and their normativity, and I argue that agents who ignore or flout actional investigative norms and then act on subsequent false beliefs are connected to the wrongness of their action in a way that establishes their blameworthiness. I also argue that epistemic norms that require agents to hold certain beliefs or make certain inferences are not relevant to culpable ignorance. Finally, I explore the implications of my view for certain interesting cases of moral ignorance. I discuss ignorance that results from an agent's social or historical circumstances, ignorance that stems from pure moral deference, and ignorance that is explained by epistemic difficulty of getting certain moral facts right.

There are two striking outcomes of my research. The first is that reflection on the

epistemic condition shows that one cannot think deeply about moral responsibility without also engaging issues in epistemology relating to the nature and normativity of belief, and issues in normative ethics relating to what our moral obligations actually are. The second striking outcome is that bringing these rather disparate topics together, as I attempted to do, reveals that much of our ignorance is actually non-culpable, and that many of our beliefs about the blameworthiness of ignorant agents are unwarranted.

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Chapter 1: Theories of Culpable Ignorance

1.1 THE PROBLEM

1.2 THE MANY FACES OF MORAL RESPONSIBILITY

1.3 THE STRUCTURE OF THE EPISTEMIC CONDITION

1.4 CULPABLE IGNORANCE: VOLITIONISM

1.5 CULPABLE IGNORANCE: BENIGHTING ACCOUNT

1.6 CULPABLE IGNORANCE: ATTRIBUTIONISM

1.1 THE PROBLEM

Philosophical discussions about moral responsibility have traditionally been comprised of arguments about freedom. Specifically, philosophers have argued about what kind of freedom an agent must have in order to be morally responsible and whether this kind of freedom is compatible with causal determinism. Much less attention has been given to the epistemic condition of moral responsibility, which concerns questions about what an agent needs to know or believe in order to be responsible. Any theory of the epistemic condition must distinguish between ignorance that is exculpating and ignorance that is inculcating. Blameless ignorance about the harmful nature of an action or its consequences seems to be exculpating in the same way and perhaps for the same reasons that the lack of freedom is exculpating. Agents who act on blameless ignorance seem to be disconnected from the badness or wrongness of their actions in a way that makes ascriptions of moral responsibility problematic. If, for example, I simply didn't know that the bottled water I offered you had been tainted at the bottling plant, then I am not morally responsible if you get sick. The same cannot be said for agents who act from culpable ignorance. If I knew that there was a problem of toxic water coming from this bottling plant and if I knew that I could easily assess whether the bottle was tainted, but I

simply failed to do so, then, intuitively, I would be blameworthy if you get sick. My ignorance in this case seems culpable because I knew your health was at stake, and I knew that my ignorance about whether you would be drinking tainted water could have easily been avoided. An account of the epistemic condition should explain the difference between blamelessly ignorant agents and culpably ignorant ones in a way that illuminates why it is fair or reasonable to blame me in the latter case but not the former. The questions and problems associated with the epistemic condition of moral responsibility are distinct from concerns about freedom and determinism, and, fortunately, their philosophical neglect has recently abated. This dissertation contributes to this newly thriving body of literature by defending a novel account of the epistemic condition for moral responsibility.

1.2 THE MANY FACES OF FREEDOM AND MORAL RESPONSIBILITY

Before I can either defend my own account of the epistemic condition or criticize existing accounts, I will first clarify the concepts that are central to this strand of philosophical inquiry. The term “freedom” is by no means univocal in the free will literature. Candidate definitions include: “the ability to do otherwise”, “the ability to do otherwise if one chooses to”, “the ability to have one’s actions respond to reasons”, etc. Fortunately, for the purposes of my inquiry I do not have to tackle this issue. The reason is that questions of culpable ignorance, and more generally, questions about the epistemic condition of moral responsibility arise whatever conception of freedom one favors. As will become clear below, I think that the relevance of ignorance to questions of moral responsibility will involve issues that stand apart from whatever metaphysical conception

of freedom holds true. That is, the question of whether ignorance can excuse or exempt agents from moral responsibility will be a live one under all of the foregoing conceptions of freedom. For this reason, I am happy to remain agnostic about what sort of freedom is required for moral responsibility.

The term moral responsibility is also non-univocal.¹ As will be apparent from my discussion below, our discourse on moral responsibility is frustratingly hazy and ambiguous. The claim that “X is morally responsible” is frequently taken to be synonymous with “X is praiseworthy/blameworthy”. Other times it is taken to be synonymous with “X is the appropriate target of emotional reactions, such as anger and resentment, to their action”. Still other times it seems to be the weaker claim that “X is answerable for their action”. Gary Watson has attempted to make some headway in this conceptual morass. In his article “Two Faces of Moral responsibility”² he argues that there are two perspectives from which one can understand an agent to be responsible. Judgments made from what Watson calls “the *aretaic* perspective” are claims are grounded on the act being the expression or indication of a fault in the agent. These judgments are concerned with agency and attributability. Actions that are attributable in this sense ‘flow’ from our commitments; they “implicate our practical identity”.³ To say that an agent is *aretaically responsible* for an action is to say something about the relation that the action stands to the agent’s “fundamental evaluative orientation”.⁴ The second perspective elucidated by Watson focuses on judgments that involve the practices of

¹ See: John Martin Fischer and Neal Tognazzini, “The Physiognomy of Responsibility,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* (2011); N.A. Vincent, “A Structured Taxonomy of Responsibility Concepts,” *Moral Responsibility* (2011): 15–35.

² Gary Watson, “Two Faces Of Responsibility,” *Philosophical Topics* 24, no. 2 (1998): 227–248.

³ *Ibid.*, 271.

⁴ *Ibid.*

holding someone accountable. To hold someone accountable is to judge her to be liable to sanctions such as blame. Therefore, holding *accountable* is judging that someone is liable to blame for her action. Watson maintains that judging them liable and then actually carrying out the blaming behaviors seems to require the control condition. As such, it is only from the accountability perspective that avoidability is relevant to judgments of responsibility. The agent may still be responsible in the attributability sense, since the acts are thought to be expression of their practical identity, even if there is an important sense in which she was not in control of the formation of this identity.⁵

For the purposes of my dissertation, I will utilize a more robust notion moral responsibility that encompasses both “faces” of responsibility. I will assume something like the following account of moral responsibility.

(M) X is morally responsible for act A if and only if X is a reflection of the agent’s practical identity and X is liable to blame (or praise) for A-ing.

Whereas Watson's discussion is helpful because it clarifies the differences between an agent having an action attributed to them and their being liable to blame for them, I think that this way of carving things up misses something important. There are several reasons why I don’t follow Watson’s taxonomy. The first is that I do not think that *aeretaic* responsibility is sufficiently robust. I take it that one of the driving concerns behind an inquiry into the conditions for moral responsibility in the face of ignorance or determinism is that judgments of moral responsibility necessarily entail claims about reacting to agents for their wrongdoing. When we judge that some belief or action is a

⁵ For a similar account of these two ‘faces’ of moral responsibility, see Angela M. Smith, “On Being Responsible and Holding Responsible,” *The Journal of Ethics* 11, no. 4 (January 2007): 465–484.

reflection of her practical identity, however, we are not thereby committed to any robust normative claim about how we should or should not respond to her. Since nothing deeply normative follows from *aretaic* assessment and since I think that the concern with getting judgments of moral responsibility right is motivated by such deep normative concerns, I will adopt a conception of moral responsibility that embodies both attributability and accountability.

A second reason to adopt (M) is that the attribution of an act to an agent on the grounds that the act ‘flowed’ from her commitments and her practical identity immediately raises the issue of whether the agent is responsible for their practical identity. Susan Wolf raises this objection against accounts of moral responsibility that are best characterized as *aeretaic*. In an influential critique of this type of view, which she calls the *deep self* view, she writes:

“Nonetheless, we sometimes question the responsibility of a fully developed agent even when she acts in a way that is clearly attributable to her real self. For we sometimes have reasons to question an agent’s responsibility for her real self. That is, we may think it is not the agent’s fault that she is the person she is – in other words, we may think it is not her fault that she has, not just the desires, but the values she does.”⁶

Although she is talking about determinism in this passage, the same worry applies in the discussion of the epistemic condition of moral responsibility. If elements of an agent’s practical identity, such as their values and commitments, lead them to hold false beliefs, a

⁶ S. Wolf, *Freedom Within Reason* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1993), 37.

question remains about whether they are responsible for their practical identity and for the commitments that caused them to have false beliefs. For example, a male raised in a rigidly patriarchal society may falsely believe that, a woman's interests can be discounted if they conflict with his own. An argument could be made that since they are related to the commitments and values that constitute his practical identity, he is *aretaically* responsible for any actions based on his false beliefs. Wolf's objection is that this is too superficial to ground responses to him that are central to moral responsibility – questions about why he has the commitments and values he does seem relevant. This is not the place to discuss whether or not this person is in fact morally responsible, but it illustrates that *aretaic* responsibility leaves open questions of blameworthiness and punishment. By working with a conception of moral responsibility that builds in the blameworthiness component, I can forestall objections that my account of the necessary conditions for moral responsibility only grounds superficial assessments of agents. Hence, in what follows, the sense of moral responsibility that I employ is (M).

1.3 THE STRUCTURE OF THE EPISTEMIC CONDITION

Any account of the epistemic condition for responsibility will be disjunctive; it will be met when the agent under appraisal either knowingly does something wrong or is culpably ignorant about some feature of the act in virtue of which it is wrong. Since the first disjunct is uncontroversial and theoretically straightforward, most of the discussion about the epistemic condition is focused on the issue of establishing the conditions that must be met if ignorance is to count as culpable. In its most general formulation, the

epistemic condition is as follows:

(EC): X is morally responsible for A-ing only if either X knew that it was wrong to A or X was culpably ignorant about whether it was wrong to A.

It follows that if an agent acts wrongly on the basis of non-culpable ignorance, she fails to meet EC and is not morally responsible.

The remainder of this chapter is entirely critical. I will examine several of the most important and influential attempts to provide an account of the epistemic condition of moral responsibility. I've divided the views into benighting accounts, attributionism, and volitionism. My task for the rest of the chapter is to argue that they all fail in some important respect.-

1.4 CULPABLE IGNORANCE: VOLITIONISM

In this section of this chapter, I will argue that an influential account of the epistemic condition for moral responsibility is not acceptable. I will first describe and motivate a theory of culpable ignorance called volitionism, which is, roughly, the view that for ignorance to be culpable it must trace back to a previous action that was under the agent's control. Second, I document what I take to be the strongest reason to accept volitionism – namely an argument that any non-volitionist alternative makes unfair epistemic demands on agents. For example, a non-volitionist account of culpable ignorance might state that agents are culpably ignorant by falling short of an expectation to form beliefs in a non-arrogant manner. On such a view, an agent may arrogantly manage her belief formation processes without necessarily being in control of that process – her arrogance might be a character trait that it is beyond her control to completely eliminate.

Volitionists argue that the epistemic demand not to form beliefs arrogantly is unfair unless the agent has control over whether or not she possesses the trait of epistemic arrogance. Having described volitionism and detailed its motivation, I argue both that the volitionist's insistence that epistemic demands be fair is ultimately misguided and that, in any case, many such demands are fair, even by volitionists' lights.

1.3.1 The structure of volitionism

Volitionism, which is defended by Gideon Rosen⁷, Michael Zimmerman⁸, and Neil Levy⁹, is an account of the epistemic condition shaped by the intuitive notion that a given agent is responsible for an action only if the action was under her control. More formally:

Control Condition: X is responsible for Φ -ing at t only if X was in control of Φ -ing at t.

The requisite control is absent if, for example, an agent is under hypnosis, brainwashed, or being manipulated by crafty neuroscientists. The **control condition** is motivated by the fact that that we typically see processes or situations that diminish or eliminate an agent's control as responsibility-mitigators.

When volitionists appeal to the control condition in their account of the epistemic condition they are immediately confronted with a problem. If agents are only responsible for whatever falls within the sphere of their volitional control, they will be responsible for too little of their ignorance. After all, as many philosophers have pointed out, there is an

⁷ Gideon Rosen. (2004). "Skepticism about moral responsibility," *Philosophical Perspectives*, 18(1), 295-313.

⁸ Michael Zimmerman. (1997). "Moral responsibility and ignorance," *Ethics*, 107(3), 410-426.

⁹ Neil Levy. (2009). "Culpable ignorance and responsibility: a reply to Fitzpatrick," *Ethics*, 119(4), 729-741.

important sense in which agents are not in control over their beliefs.¹⁰ Belief formation is typically conceived of as a passive process that is not directly subject to our will.¹¹ We may be in control of performing certain actions that provide us with our evidence, but the beliefs that we form on the basis of our evidence is not up to us. If these observations about belief are right, then we almost always lack the kind of control over our beliefs that the control condition for responsibility requires. It follows that we are rarely if ever culpable for any of our beliefs. This outcome obviously allows volitionists to classify brainwashing and manipulation cases the right way. Such agents obviously fail to meet the control condition with respect to their beliefs, and it would be absurd to claim that these agents were culpably ignorant. The problem is that this result comes at a cost - the volitionist account of culpable ignorance does not classify beliefs of gratuitously negligent agents as culpable. The reason volitionists are vulnerable here is that beliefs are notoriously not up to us. As literature on doxastic voluntarism has documented, the beliefs that even the most negligent physician forms fall outside their sphere of control. Here is Rosen on this point:

(B)elief revision is a passive matter. I can take various active steps to influence the content of my opinion: I can consult my guru; I can read a book; I can sit and think about a question. But once I have taken these active measures, the change in view itself is something that simply happens in me or to me. It is not something I do.¹²

If responsibility requires control and if belief formation is a passive process that we don't

¹⁰ William Alston. *Epistemic Justification: Essays in the Theory of Knowledge* (1989, Cornell UP)

¹¹ Pamela Heironymi. (2008). "Responsibility for believing," *Synthese*, 161, 357-373.

¹² G. Rosen, "Skepticism About Moral Responsibility," *Philosophical Perspectives* 18, no. 1 (2004): 302.

control, then how could anyone be responsible for her ignorance? Volitionists are right to recognize this potential problem with their view and are motivated to develop their account of the epistemic condition in a way that accords more closely with the thought that certain grossly negligent agents are culpably ignorant even though they are not in direct control of their beliefs.

The volitionist's solution to this problem is to see if any of the agent's false beliefs trace to some aspect of the agent's deliberative history that does meet the control condition. If the agent's ignorance can be traced to a prior action over which she was in control, then she is culpable for it. The class of actions to which volitionists typically appeal is epistemic norm violations. Thus, for a given false belief to be culpable, it must stem from the act of violating an epistemic norm. The resulting view of culpable ignorance is:

Volitionism: X is culpable for believing falsely that p only if

- (1) X's belief is the effect of an epistemic norm violation *and*
- (2) X was in control of this epistemic norm violation

Consider, once more, the lazy physician who shirked her epistemic obligation to keep up with the latest research in her field and becomes ignorant of new, widely-published research showing that a popularly prescribed therapy is actually toxic. Assume further that she acts on this ignorance and harms a patient of hers. According to volitionism she is culpably ignorant so long as she was in control of whether or not she acted in such a

way as to meet her epistemic obligations.¹³ It is important to note that according to volitionism, the agent is not presumed to be in direct control of her beliefs. Even the culpably ignorant agent forms her beliefs on the basis of the evidence she has acquired, and she makes inferences from one belief or set of beliefs to another. These are largely passive processes over which agents have little control. The negligent physician's ignorance is owed both to these passive processes and to her failure to accord with the norms of investigation that apply to physicians. These norms, which Rosen calls "procedural epistemic norms", govern actions over which the agent is presumed to have control. The physician was in control over whether she read her journals, but she chose not to. Her ignorance is culpable according to volitionism because it can be traced to an action for which the agent is plainly responsible. This is a welcome refinement to the naïve application of the control condition to the problem of ignorance and responsibility considered above. Although we are typically not in control of our doxastic economy, it is at least plausible that much of our ignorance is owed to epistemic norms violations. If agents control how much effort they devote to scrutinizing their beliefs and how thoroughly and carefully they conduct the relevant research, then they are in control over whether they meet the investigative epistemic norms that apply to them.

Although the turn to epistemic norms makes volitionism seem more plausible, another worry immediately presents itself. What if the agent did not know that she was under an epistemic norm that required her either to scrutinize her beliefs or to conduct a bunch of research? Imagine that the physician was not only ignorant about the safety of the therapies she prescribes, but was also ignorant about her epistemic obligation to stay

current on her journals. This physician's ignorance is deeper than the first physician who knew she should have done her research but just didn't do it. In order to determine whether the second, more deeply ignorant physician is culpable for her ignorance about the safety of her therapies, we need to establish whether she is also culpable for the ignorance of her epistemic obligation to stay current on the latest findings in her field. This requires another application of volitionism. Call the ignorant action (harming the patient) **Z**, and the ignorance-producing epistemic norm-violation (not doing research) **Y**. In order to determine whether the agent is responsible for the ignorant action (**Z**), he must establish that the ignorance-producing epistemic norm violation (**Y**), was either done knowingly or not. **Y** may have been done knowingly, as would be the case if the physician knew she was under the relevant epistemic norm but violated it anyway. In this case, the agent is responsible for **Z** because her ignorance is traced to a witting violation of an epistemic norm, namely, **Y**. However, if **Y** is also done from ignorance, the volitionist must now determine whether the agent is culpable for *this* ignorance. In order to ground culpability for the ignorance attending the performance of **Y**, volitionism states that the ignorance must trace to a prior epistemic norm violation, call it **X**. This is an altogether different epistemic norm violation from **Y**. The physician may have been under an obligation to remember her professional obligation to stay current on her research. You can think of the norm violated in **X** as a second-order epistemic norm – an epistemic duty to recall/remember other epistemic duties. Again, **X** may have been done wittingly or not, and the same series of questions can be asked with respect to it. In order to ground culpability for ignorance, the volitionist shifts the focus to a prior ignorance-producing action. But if that action is itself done from ignorance, then the focus must

shift to a still prior ignorance-producing action, and so on, until an agent acts without ignorance.

The regress can only be stopped by establishing the existence of a prior *non-ignorant* failure to act in accordance with epistemic obligations. Once this is established, culpability transfers to all future ignorance. Thus, a culpably ignorant agent cannot be ignorant all the way back. This feature of volitionism is well known to its defenders.¹⁴ Zimmerman, for example, has argued that all culpability for ignorant action must trace to a previous action done without ignorance - done from the belief that it is wrong. He has named this feature the ‘origination thesis’:

Origination Thesis: “Every chain of culpability is such that at its origin lies an item of behavior for which the agent is directly culpable and which the agent believed at the time at which the behavior occurred, to be morally wrong”.¹⁵

It follows from volitionism, and the origination thesis that is implied by it, that ignorance is only culpable if it is traceable to action that was performed with the belief that it was wrong. Since one species of akratic action involves believing an action is wrong and doing it anyway, Levy notes that “holding (ignorant agents) responsible requires holding them responsible for akratic actions.”¹⁶ It bears mentioning here that on other accounts of *akrasia*, Levy’s claim is not exactly correct. One might think that akratic action requires acting against one’s judgments of where the balance of reasons lies. Consider Donald Davidson’s account of akratic action (which he labels ‘incontinent’ action):

¹⁴ Rosen, Levy, and Zimmerman have each accepted this feature of their views.

¹⁵ Zimmerman, p.176

¹⁶ Neil Levy, “Culpable Ignorance and Moral Responsibility: A Reply to FitzPatrick,” *Ethics* 119, no. 4 (July 1, 2009): 730.

In doing *b* an agent acts incontinently if and only if: (a) the agent does *b* intentionally; (b) the agent believes there is an alternative action *a* open to him; and (c) the agent judges that, all things considered, it would be better to do *a* than to do *b*.¹⁷

On this view of akratic action, an agent who believes that there are decisive moral reasons to do action *a*, but who does *b* instead, does not necessarily act akratically, since there might be other reasons to do *b* that outweigh the moral reasons to do *a*. For example, an agent who believes that morality requires her to turn a friend over to the authorities, but who thinks the duties of friendship require otherwise does not seem obviously to act from weakness of will if she sides with her friend.¹⁸ From her perspective, she may be acting in accordance with what the balance of reasons supports, even though she does not act in the way that moral reasons seem to require. Not much turns on this, since volitionists can simply stipulate that they are using the term “*akrasia*” in a more restrictive sense, according to which an agent acts akratically if and only if she acts against what she takes to be a moral requirement. For the sake of brevity, I will follow the volitionists in using “*akrasia*” in this different sense.

The volitionists are right that the structure of their theory seems to commit them to the position that culpable ignorance must trace back to akratic action – an action done in the belief that it is wrong. So far, I have not entertained any arguments for volitionism. I have merely detailed its motivation and structure. Now that the contours of the position are in view, the stage is set for an examination of the strongest case for volitionism. In the next section I argue that it is undermined by several important objections.

¹⁷ Donald Davidson, *Essays on actions and events* (Oxford University Press, 2001), 21–42.

¹⁸ For more on this topic see: Dean Cocking and Jeanette Kennett, “Friendship and Moral Danger,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 97, no. 5 (May 1, 2000): 278–296.

1.3.2 the argument for the origination thesis

The strongest argument for volitionism is actually a general argument against non-volitionism. Volitionists have a powerful argument against any account of the epistemic condition that does not ground culpable ignorance in *akrasia*. Neil Levy put the most recent and well-argued version of this argument forward. His specific target is a non-volitionist account of culpable ignorance recently defended by William Fitzpatrick, though the problem he raises is a general one that applies to any account of the epistemic condition that does not ground culpable ignorance in akratic action. In this sub-section I will explicate the structure of one non-volitionist view and detail the volitionist's case against it.

One way of avoiding the origination thesis is to defend an account of culpable ignorance that does not require the trace to an akratic action. Fitzpatrick, for example, recently defended an account of culpable ignorance according to which ignorance is culpable, if the agent

Could reasonably have been expected to take measures that would have corrected or avoided it, given her capabilities and the opportunities provided by the social context, but failed to do so either due to *akrasia* or due to the culpable nonakratic exercise of such vices as overconfidence, arrogance, dismissiveness, laziness, dogmatism, incuriosity, self-indulgence, contempt and so on.¹⁹

I will refer to this account as “hybrid” because of its disjunctive character – it includes

¹⁹ William Fitzpatrick. (2008). “Moral Responsibility and Normative Ignorance: Answering a New Skeptical Challenge”, *Ethics* 118(4): 589–614.

the akratic condition in the first disjunct and a non-akratic condition in the second. One important difference between hybrid and volitionism is that agents who never believed that they were acting wrongly can satisfy the second disjunct of hybrid. An agent who forms beliefs dogmatically, lazily, or arrogantly may come to hold and act on many false moral beliefs without ever believing, occurrently or otherwise, that they are either acting wrongly or violating an epistemic norm. As such, their ignorance is not traceable to any akratic act. Fitzpatrick and Levy both discuss an imaginary case where a ruthless businessman named Potter falsely believes that exploitative business practices are morally permissible. We are to imagine that he forms his beliefs arrogantly and that he never really questioned his moral views or took them to be disputed. He just failed to recognize any opportunity to reflect deeply on whether his views were right. If Potter never even saw this opportunity, then there is definitely no time at which he believed that he should have taken an opportunity to scrutinize his moral views. Thus, even if there is an epistemic norm that calls for scrutinizing one's moral views, he never violated it akratically. His ignorance is not traceable to an akratic act. This is of no import, however, if hybrid is true. Because of the vicious way in which he formed his beliefs, Potter is culpably ignorant about the permissibility of exploitation.

Levy maintains that hybrid and any other view that does not ground culpability for ignorance on akratic action are deeply problematic. He argues that it is not reasonable to expect agents to take measures to modify their belief formation in cases where agents did not form them akratically. There are two central claims in his argument. First, he claims that it is unfair to expect agents to form their beliefs in accordance with some standard so long as the agent lacks the capacity to do so. Second, he claims that agents

have the capacity to modify their beliefs in the expected way only if they can conform to the expectation in a rational way. If it would not be rational for the agent to rethink and reexamine her dogmatically held views, then she doesn't actually have the capacity to manage her beliefs in accordance with our expectations. If the agent lacks the capacity to manage her beliefs in accordance with our expectations, then it is unfair to expect her to do so. Thus, the fairness of any expectation to conform to this or that epistemic norm turns on whether the agent can rationally conform to the expectation. Importantly, Levy argues that the relevant sense of rational is internal. He writes:

“The point is merely that what agents can do rationally – that is, by way of a reasoning procedure – is a function of their actual representations and pro-attitudes”.²⁰

The real crux of Levy’s argument against non-volitionist accounts of culpable ignorance is the internalist reading of rationality. If a dogmatic believer simply does not believe that it is incumbent on her to re-examine her dogmatically held beliefs, then she cannot decide to re-examine her beliefs via rational deliberation. The underlying thought is that one cannot deliberate about what are non-options from the perspective of the agent.

This is not to deny that the agents are forming or maintaining beliefs in epistemically vicious ways. Levy is just claiming that our expectation that such agents think in epistemically virtuous ways is valid only if the agent sees that she has a reason to think differently. If he is right about this, then hybrid must be false because the expectation that an agent avoid forming beliefs in epistemically vicious ways is not conditioned on facts about how things appear from the agent’s perspective. Importantly, this objection generalizes to every account of the epistemic condition that does not

²⁰ Levy, pp.735-36

ground culpability in an akratic action, for it is only in cases where agents know that they are subject to an epistemic norm that they possess a deliberative pathway towards conforming to the norm. Of course, akratics do not take that deliberative pathway, but the point is that this pathway is an option from their perspective. Since the non-volitionist's expectation cannot be met rationally, it is unfair. On the internalist conception of rationality, the class of rational actions is limited by the agent's internal reasons, which Levy understands roughly as determined by the agent's actual beliefs. Unless Potter takes himself to be forming beliefs in epistemically vicious ways, he cannot rationally deliberate toward the belief that exploitation is wrong. The case against non-volitionism rests on this internalist account of reasons and rationality and the view that only internally rational expectations are fair.

1.3.3 Resisting the volitionist's argument

Before moving on to discuss the merits of Levy's position, it is important to quickly note that there are two kinds of expectations he and Fitzpatrick may have in mind. The following passage from Levy is subject to more than one interpretation:

Potter, I argue, could not rationally have taken advantage of the opportunities for moral improvement that were (in some sense) available to him; hence, we cannot reasonably expect him to do so.²¹

One interpretation of this passage is that Potter could not rationally comply with an expectation to initiate a deliberative process that would have corrected or improve his

²¹ Levy, "Culpable Ignorance and Moral Responsibility," 735.

moral beliefs. On this interpretation, we do not expect Potter to succeed in changing his mind. The opportunities of which Potter is supposed to take advantage are opportunities to subject his current moral views to scrutiny. On this interpretation, Fitzpatrick's non-volitionist view holds that Potter is culpably ignorant because he arrogantly failed to initiate the re-evaluation of his moral views. By contrast, Levy seeks to establish that these expectations are unfair on the grounds that Potter can't rationally meet them – that Potter has no reason to begin scrutinizing his moral beliefs. A second interpretation of Levy's claim that Potter cannot rationally comply with the expectation to "take advantage of moral improvement" holds that the relevant expectation is for Potter to *succeed* in changing his mind. The idea here is that we expect more of Potter than merely to start thinking about his moral views. In addition to expecting this, we also expect him to come around to the view that his moral beliefs were mistaken. On this interpretation of Fitzpatrick's non-volitionism, Potter is culpably ignorant because he arrogantly failed to form true moral beliefs about how his employees deserve to be treated. By contrast, Levy must argue that Potter cannot rationally come to hold different moral beliefs.

With this distinction on the table, it is easier to think through the volitionist's complaint about non-volitionism, which turns on the idea that these expectations are fair only if it would be rational from the perspective of the agent to comply with them. I do not deny that there is something to be said for this line of response to the non-volitionist, and much of what I say in later chapters (especially chapters 3 and 5) is consistent with this internalist constraint. My worry is that the emphasis on internalism is misplaced, given the issue at hand, which is the question of how agents who fall short of these expectations can be culpably ignorant and blameworthy for actions on that ignorance. If

the relevant expectation is only that the agent investigates then how does culpability transfer from their akratic failure to comply with the expectation to investigate to subsequent wrong action? There is still a gap in the volitionist's account between being a lazy thinker and being responsible for the serious harms that are committed in ignorance. Simply requiring the former does not suffice to establish the latter. The same question arises if the relevant expectation is that the agent actually succeeds in forming the right beliefs. How is it that witting failures to comply with a norm requiring a certain belief count as moral as opposed to merely epistemic failures? Simply to raise these objections suggests that any adequate account of culpable ignorance must make clear just how witting failures to comply with epistemic obligations connect the agent to her the wrongness of her ignorant action. Levy's internalist requirement, though important in order to avoid the regress problem, is on only an initial step in the development of a complete theory.

A further problem with Levy's view concerns his claim that agents lack reasons to investigate their moral beliefs. The non-volitionist can simply reply that, in fact, agents such as Potter actually have internal reasons to examine their beliefs. After all, unless an agent is completely sheltered from people who hold contradictory beliefs, she will believe that her views are not universally shared. Even if Potter does not believe that he is epistemically vicious, he probably believes that others disagree with him about the permissibility of exploitation. This belief itself seems like it can function as an internal reason. It opens up the requisite deliberative pathway toward meeting the expectation to form beliefs non-viciously. Levy considers this response and argues that our awareness of the fact that our beliefs are challenged by the beliefs of others does not by itself

generate an internal reason to reassess them. He notes that, “we dismiss the views of Holocaust deniers and racists without pausing to consider whether there is a grain of truth in their claims (and we are right to do so)”.²²

I think that this reply is too quick for several reasons. First, I think that what is going on when we rightly dismiss the beliefs of Holocaust deniers and racists is rather more complicated than Levy lets on. It is true that we dismiss their beliefs without seeing their disagreement as a reason to reconsider our own. But, our grounds for doing this are that we have strong antecedent reasons to think they are unreliable sources. I think that astrologists are unreliable sources of information about future events, so I put no stock in their beliefs about who will win the Super Bowl or whether I will get a job I applied for. I do this without seeing their beliefs as providing reasons to re-evaluate my own. But, this kind of dismissal only seems warranted if the belief that they are unreliable sources of information is itself warranted. It is true that racists and Holocaust deniers allow hatred to influence their belief formation processes, and for this reason we do not see their disagreement with us as a reason to examine our own beliefs. However, in the absence of a prior reason to dismiss the beliefs of others as unreliable, our awareness that others disagree with us certainly does seem to provide us with an internal reason to examine our beliefs. So long as a sufficiently large set of disagreements are not explained away by writing off our interlocutors as unreliable, we seem to have abundance of internal reasons that can function as a deliberative starting points for the self-examination of our beliefs. If this is right, then non-akratic agents actually can rationally conform to the expectation that they re-examine their views in the face of disagreement. Our awareness of the fact that people disagree with us can provide us with the

²² Levy, p. 737.

deliberative pathway to conforming to epistemic expectations. It follows from this that non-akratic agents can have the *capacity* to conform to this expectation and, thus, can be fairly expected to do so. Levy's case against the non-volitionist is undercut by the fact that in most cases, our awareness that someone disagrees with us generates an internal reason to scrutinize our beliefs. If I am right about this, then volitionism is not the only way to meet the fairness condition on epistemic expectations.

The non-volitionist has a stronger response yet. It involves establishing that agents have internal reasons to subject all of their beliefs to scrutiny because of what it is to be a believer. David Velleman has famously argued that it is constitutive of being a belief that the agent "aims at the truth".²³ Very roughly, we, *qua* believers, are committed to a concern that our beliefs be true. Agents who form beliefs without a concern for their beliefs being true are simply not in the business of believing. One might then ground an internal reason for an agent to scrutinize her beliefs on the nature of belief itself. *Pace* Levy, one might argue that there is a rational deliberative pathway available to non-akratic agents like Potter that turns on the commitment that is constitutive of being a believer. Although Potter believes occurrently that he need not subject his beliefs to scrutiny, as a believer he is committed to doing so because he is committed to securing beliefs that are true. Even if he does not have before his conscious mind any reason to reconsider his specific belief about the morality of exploitation, he seems perfectly capable of calling on his general commitment to have beliefs that aim at the truth. In as much as commitments seem by their nature to be internal, they seem obviously to provide reasons of the kind that required by Levy's argument above. A Vellemanian take on the nature of belief is another powerful way to diffuse Levy's critique of hybrid and indeed

²³ Velleman, J. D. (2000). "On the Aim of Belief." In *The Possibility of Practical Reason*, (2004, Clarendon).

of any theory of culpable ignorance that grounds the ignorant agent's culpability on something short of clear-eyed *akrasia*.²⁴

Thus, contra Levy, there are at least two ways of establishing the existence of internal reasons for the ignorant agents to take measures that would have corrected their ignorance even if the existence of their ignorance is not owed to some akratic action. If I am right, then even on the internalist reading of hybrid, which is the one endorsed by Levy, agents who are ignorant can rationally deliberate in a way that *could* lead to the correction of their beliefs. Therefore, it is not unreasonable or unfair to expect them to revise or attempt to revise their beliefs even when those demands seem unreasonable from the perspective of the agent. Whatever an agent occurrently believes, she has internal reasons from which she can reason her way to different beliefs.

1.4 CULPABLE IGNORANCE: SMITH'S BENIGHTING ACCOUNT

The next account of culpable ignorance that I discuss is defended by Holly Smith in her groundbreaking article "Culpable Ignorance".²⁵ My first unanswered question about Levy concerns his failure to clarify how an agent's willing failure to investigate connects him to the wrongness of subsequent wrong action. Smith's account provides a

²⁴ There is yet a third way to resist Levy's claim that agents have internal reasons to examine their beliefs only if they formed them akratically. Philosophers writing on the topic of on epistemic rationality have argued that we ascribe reasons for an agent to believe that *p* only if agents have an antecedent desire to have true beliefs. On this view, the fact that the ignorant agent believes for reasons at all entails that he desires to have true beliefs. Therefore, Potter and others who hold beliefs dogmatically certainly can initiate a rational deliberative process by calling on this desire, together with general beliefs about the relevance of evidence to truth. If Potter desires to have true beliefs and believes that true beliefs are better secured by subjecting them to scrutiny, then he has a reason to subject each individual belief to scrutiny. Obviously, this would include his belief about exploitation. Again, it may not be before her conscious mind that she should think more carefully about her beliefs regarding the exploitation of the poor, she nonetheless possesses that reason in a way that seems to meet the standards for being internal.

²⁵ H. Smith, "Culpable Ignorance," *The Philosophical Review* 92, no. 4 (1983): 543–571.

straightforward answer to this question. On her view, ignorance is culpable if it can be traced to a prior act for which the agent is blameworthy, which she dubs a “benighting act”. The idea is that, in becoming ignorant, an agent can increase the risk that she will act wrongly at a later time. Smith summarizes her view as follows:

To say the culpably ignorant agent is to blame for his unwitting act is to say nothing more than that he was culpable in performing the benighting act, that it gave rise to the unwitting act, and that he knew at the earlier time that he risked this outcome.²⁶

This account handles many standard cases of culpable ignorance. The physician who wittingly ignores her journal reading in order to play golf may be ignorant of new research showing that a particular drug is dangerous. Intuitively, she is blameworthy for unwittingly harming patients who receive that prescription. However, in order to meet the epistemic condition for moral responsibility, her ignorance about the drug’s toxicity must be culpable. On Smith’s view, we would need to locate a benighting act that meets two conditions. First, the benighting act itself must be blameworthy. On this score, Smith’s view is correct, since knowingly shirking one’s professional duties is a plausibly blameworthy action. So far, so good. The second condition that must be met is that the subsequent act must be “within the known risk of the benighting act”²⁷. This condition also seems to be met, since the doctor knew that she increases the risk of harming her patients when she chooses not to stay up-to-date. Importantly, it is a feature of Smith’s view, and indeed of most others, that the motives and intentions of the agent that

²⁶ Ibid., 566.

²⁷ Ibid., 551.

accompany the ignorant act need not be evil or otherwise objectionable. In fact, the specific motives attending the ignorant action may be admirable. Presumably, this holds in the case under discussion. During the time that the negligently ignorant physician is administering treatment, she may be acting from an earnest desire to help her patients. What matters from the standpoint of meeting the epistemic condition for responsibility is whether the ignorance bears a special relation to a prior culpable action, not whether the motives that attend the ignorant action are admirable or otherwise reflective of moral concern. If the ignorance is related to a prior culpable action, then it is not an excuse.

Before raising some objections to Smith's account, I want to emphasize two of its most important features. The first is structural – establishing the culpability of ignorance requires *tracing* that culpability back to a prior blameworthy action. This tracing feature is significant because it represents common ground between Smith and many of her competitors. The centrality of tracing to theories of the epistemic condition has not been overlooked, and, indeed it is the focal point of recent criticism.²⁸ The second important feature of Smith's view that I would like to highlight is that the nature of the relation between the benighting act, for which the agent is blameworthy, and the subsequent, unwitting act involves *foreseen risk*. In order for the agent's ignorance to be culpable, she must know that there is some risk that her actions now will lead to ignorance and subsequent impermissible actions on that ignorance. By linking culpable ignorance to foreseen rather than foreseeable risk, Smith's account captures our intuitions about cases like the negligent physician who knew the risks of falling behind on her research. In

²⁸ The following have been critical of this structural feature of the epistemic condition: M. Vargas, "The Trouble with Tracing," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 29, no. 1 (2005): 269–291; G. Sher, *Who Knew?: Responsibility Without Awareness* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2009), footnote in chapter 1; J. M. Fischer and N. A. Tognazzini, "The Truth About Tracing," *Nous* 43, no. 3 (2009): 531–556.

what follows, I will raise three objections to Smith's account, all of which center on her claim that culpable ignorance must trace back to foreseen risk of ignorance.

It is a feature of Smith's view that in order for ignorance to be culpable, an agent must have foreseen that the risk of being ignorant was increased by a prior act. Though this view may do well in classifying ignorance that results from a certain class of negligent actions, there are many other types of intuitively culpable ignorance that do not typically fall under the known risk of any benighting act. I take it to be uncontroversial that each human has her fair share of false moral beliefs. The problem is that the kind of witting benighting acts that Smith's account requires seems not to figure very prominently in the formation of one's moral beliefs. The formation of an agent's moral character seems to take place via a process that involves accretions of beliefs, habits, and dispositions that are frequently not the foreseen effects of prior blameworthy actions. For example, a selfish businessman's belief that the value of satisfying his own interests far exceeds the value of satisfying the interests of others may be the outcome of many non-blameworthy, yet character forming actions taken in pursuit of a career in corporate finance. Unlike cases of negligence in the management of one's belief (such as the doctor case above), there probably was not a time that the businessman's current selfish treatment of others was foreseen as the likely effect of his prior choices. Of course, it may have been foreseeable, but, this would be no help for Smith's account since she requires the more stringent epistemic standard, namely that the risk of ignorance was actually foreseen. But, if we think that most of our moral beliefs are formed through similar causally opaque processes, and if we think, nevertheless, that agents can be responsible for acting false moral beliefs formed in this way, then Smith's account falls

short. The requirement that agents foresee the ways in which their current actions can cause them to be ignorant seems to exclude too much.

I offer this as merely a worry for Smith's view for two reasons. First, proponents of a view such as hers might maintain that enough of our normative ignorance is related in the right way to benighting acts. Since this is not the place to adjudicate this largely empirical debate, I will only register a note of skepticism about the prospects of such an endeavor. My skepticism is based on the obvious difficulties of predicting how certain acts and decisions now will collectively influence the general character traits and dispositions we will have in the future. Moreover, it seems even harder to predict how the character traits and dispositions we will come to have will interact with our personal history and social context to produce false moral beliefs. There is a second response to my worry about the rarity of foreseeing the risk that current actions pose for subsequent moral ignorance. Smith might stick to her guns and accept that agents such as the selfish businessman whose false moral beliefs do not arise by way of benighting acts simply are not culpably ignorant. The implication of course is that he fails to meet the epistemic condition and is not morally responsible for his wrongdoing. The extent to which this view is revisionist will depend on what our intuitions are about the relevant cases and how the empirical work related to moral belief formation turns out. I think that given the plausible story told above about the causal opacity of belief formation that I discuss above, such a view would actually be highly revisionist, but this may be a bullet that Smith and her proponents are willing to bite. An interesting and somewhat paradoxical implication of this response is that people, who were cavalier in the formation of those aspects of our character that are under our control, would be non-culpable for more of

their ignorance. Because of their cavalier attitude toward the downstream moral and epistemic effects of the character traits and dispositions that they strive to form, they will be less likely to foresee the ways in which they might be ignorant about moral matters. Because of their failure to foresee this, their acts of character formation will not be benighting acts for subsequent ignorant acts and their ignorance will be non-culpable. Indeed, someone might explicitly adopt a policy of avoiding readily available information about character development as a strategy for avoiding culpability. The natural way to avoid this implication is to say that agents who were cavalier about the risk of ignorance may not have actually foreseen that they would be ignorant but that their ignorance was foreseeable. Again, however, Smith's account leaves no room for this response. The agent who can't be bothered to think about the degree to which her character traits promote false beliefs will fail to meet Smith's version of the epistemic condition and would not be morally responsible for her impermissible ignorant actions.

Now, for the objection. The point of weakness in her view is her claim that ignorance is culpable if it "within the known risk of the benighting act". This condition will turn out to be too easy to satisfy in some cases, given that nearly every action seems to have knowable epistemic effects. Consider the following case:

Ignorant cheat: Gary is taking a course on moral theory and is presented with a modified Jim and the Indians case. In this case, a vicious kidnapper tells Jim that if he can't identify the difference between act utilitarianism and rule utilitarianism, then five Indians will be killed. Jim is also told that he can save their lives by simply stating the difference between act and rule utilitarianism. Gary is bored by fantastical philosophical examples like this, and decides that

rather than studying for the quiz on act vs. rule utilitarianism later that week, he will cheat off of his classmate. Amazingly, Gary is accosted by a real-life kidnapper later that day and put in the same position as Jim. Since he can't answer the question, five Indians are murdered.

Intuitively, Gary is not morally responsible for the deaths of the five Indians. After all, the incredibly low likelihood that Gary would find himself in Jim's position, seems to tell strongly against Gary having any epistemic obligation to know the difference between act and rule utilitarianism. Although Gary acted impermissibly by choosing to cheat rather than learn about the various brands of utilitarianism, his ignorance does not reflect anything like a lack of moral concern for potential abductees. However, if the intuition that Gary is not morally responsible is veridical, it presents a problem for Smith's view since he plainly seems to meet her conditions for culpable ignorance. Ignorance is culpable only when an unwitting wrong act falls within the foreseen risk of the benighting act, which itself is wrong or bad. Gary's wrongful benighting action is his choice to cheat on his exam. This action had an epistemic upshot, namely, that he was ignorant about the difference between act and rule utilitarianism. Because of Gary's particular circumstances, the unwitting wrong action was a foreseen risk of his choice to cheat rather than study act and rule utilitarianism. Since he had earlier in the day entertained the unfortunate scenario into which he was placed, it was known to him that if he did not learn about act and rule utilitarianism, he would not be in a position easily to save the Indians' lives. However astronomically improbable his predicament was, the risk that his ignorance could contribute to the loss of five human lives was known to him. Gary meets this condition simply by entertaining the thought experiment in class. Thus,

on Smith's view, Gary is in all relevant respects similar to the physician who neglects his research. His ignorance is culpable, and on the basis of this, he meets the epistemic condition for morally responsibility.

There is an obvious reply to this objection that I must consider. Someone might, rightly, point out that there is actually a significant difference between the negligent physician and Gary, the cheater. The obvious difference is that the likelihood that Gary's foreseen ignorance will result in subsequent wrongdoing is astronomically low, whereas the likelihood that the physician's foreseen ignorance will result in subsequent wrongdoing is much higher. We don't inhabit a world where philosophy students are kidnapped and coerced into living out philosophical thought experiments. By contrast, physicians are regularly confronted with patients whose treatment plan might be altered in light of recent scientific findings. This point can be put in terms of risk. A physician who neglects her research runs a significant risk of causing harm to future patients by acting on her ignorance, whereas Gary the cheater runs a negligible risk of causing harm by failing to learn moral theory. Armed with this distinction, Smith might maintain that the case of Gary does not constitute a counterexample to her view. The fact that Gary's benighting act lead to a vanishingly small chance of acting wrongly on his ignorance entails that he is not culpably ignorant.

I have two things to say in response. First, I would merely point out that the appeal to risk might only be persuasive when the consequences of the wrong action are not severe. As the gravity of the subsequent ignorant action goes up, it's reasonable to think that that the low risk of harm is consistent with culpable ignorance. If this is right, then there are actually two dimensions along which we must evaluate foreseen ignorance

before we can determine whether it is culpable. Second, and more substantively, once Smith's benighting account is expanded this way it leaves unexplained both where the thresholds of risk and severity should be. The simplicity of her account was its virtue – an agent who foresees that she runs the risk of acting ignorantly in the future if she acts wrongly now is culpably ignorant. The connection between the agent and the wrong action was clear. Supplementing Smith's view in the way I have just described leaves one wondering why certain risk-thresholds are drawn where they are – why Gary's foreseen ignorance is not culpable but some other agent's foreseen ignorance is. Moreover, even if one could draw a principled risk threshold, agents who fall just above the threshold would be culpably ignorant and those who fell just below the threshold would not. Given that they are so similar with respect to foreseen risk that they were willing to run, why should our judgments about their culpability be different? Indeed, it seems like facts not having to do with the agents themselves – namely differences in risk – will determine which agents are culpable and which ones aren't. This is a significant shortcoming of the supplemented view since a hallmark of any adequate theory of moral responsibility and, more specifically, of culpable ignorance, is that attributions of moral responsibility should rest primarily on facts about the agent herself and not about risks of wrong action.²⁹

1.5 CULPABLE IGNORANCE: ATTRIBUTIONISM

The final account of culpable ignorance that I will consider in this chapter has it that

²⁹ For more on this requirement see: Sher, *Who Knew?*, Chapter 4.

agents are morally responsible for their ignorance when it stems from their rational judgments.³⁰ The first two accounts that I considered attempted to connect the ignorant agent to the wrongness of her actions via their will. More specifically, they both traced culpable ignorance to the witting choices of the agent. Volitionists trace culpably ignorance to an akratic action, and Smith traces to actions that the agent knew would increase the risk of ignorance and ignorant wrong action. The view I consider in this section is that it takes questions of responsibility for beliefs to turn on what we are warranted in attributing to the agent given her agential activity. Attributionists take agential activity to be comprised principally of the agent's evaluations and judgments about what attitudes to adopt or which actions to perform. This view possesses the theoretical virtue of simplicity; actions, beliefs and other attitudes are attributable by virtue of the judgments the agent makes. Angela Smith summarizes the central tenets of the view here:

In order for a mental state to be attributable to a person in the sense necessary for it to be a legitimate basis of (moral) appraisal, it need not arise from conscious judgment, choice, or decision. But it must be the kind of thing that either directly reflects, or is supposed to be governed by, her evaluative judgments. This condition of moral attributability is appropriate, because moral criticism addresses a person qua rational agent and asks her to acknowledge and to defend or disavow the judgments implicit in her responses to the world around her.³¹

³⁰ See: T. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Belknap Press, 1998); Angela M. Smith, "Responsibility for Attitudes: Activity and Passivity in Mental Life," *Ethics* 115, no. 2 (January 1, 2005): 236-271; Smith, "On Being Responsible and Holding Responsible"; Pamela Hieronymi, "Responsibility for Believing," *Synthese* 161, no. 3 (December 2006): 357-373.

³¹ Smith, "Responsibility for Attitudes," 256.

One of Smith's examples is of person who forgets her friend's birthday. The fact that an agent fails to remember a friend's birthday reflects a judgment that the friend is perhaps not so important to her. She is responsible for failing to occurently believe that it is her friend's birthday and for omitting to call or send her good wishes. Attributionism is a very influential take on questions of responsibility. Though there are subtle differences among its proponents, their underlying theme is that moral appraisal is directed at agents whose judgments are subject to rational criticism for their attitudes or actions that stem from their evaluative judgments. On their view, so long as a belief, attitude or action is "normatively connected" to the agent's judgments, she is morally responsible for it. Instructively, Scanlon summarizes attributionism as it relates to blame in the following passage:

It is clear that the kind of responsibility required for blame is what I have called "responsibility as attributability". All that is required is that the attitudes that make blame appropriate can in fact be attributed to the person as "his".³²

In this subsection I will first motivate attributionism as it informs the epistemic condition by showing that it has intuitively plausible results for common sense cases of culpable ignorance. Then I will argue that the view is ultimately unacceptable. For example, it fails to distinguish between cases of culpable and non-culpable ignorance. I also argue that despite their claims to the contrary, attributionists establish a connection between acts and agents that is at once too shallow and insignificant from the standpoint of moral appraisal.

³² Thomas Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions: Permissibility, Meaning, Blame* (Harvard University Press, 2008), 202.

Attributionism, like the other theories I've discussed, rightly sees claims about moral responsibility as coming down to the establishment of a particular relation between the agent and the mental state, attitude, or action under appraisal. Of course, in the process of making judgments, agents will come to hold many false beliefs, and agents will be responsible for those that meet the attributionist's conditions. This immediately raises the question what possible account the attributionist could provide of non-culpable ignorance. Let's reconsider the case of the negligent physician. Rather than reading her journals, she repeatedly decides to play golf and eventually comes to hold false beliefs about the safety of several drugs she regularly prescribes. We can assume for the sake of argument that her choice to neglect her research was not akratic and that it stemmed from a genuine lack of concern for having true beliefs about drug safety. Attributionists seem to get this case right because the physician's false beliefs about how best to treat her patients are a reflection of at least two different judgments. First, she made a judgment about the relative importance of leisurely pursuits in the face of her professional duty to stay current on the latest research in her field. Second, her false beliefs were a reflection of her judgment that the evidence supports her belief that a given drug is safe. These evaluative judgments, both about the permissibility of leisure and about what she ought to believe given her evidence, lead her to have false beliefs. The attributionist will claim that this suffices to establish her responsibility for her ignorance.

The problem is that something similar also applies to the diligent physician whose false beliefs were the result of simply being unable to achieve complete and veridical knowledge of her field despite her strong commitment to stay informed. Her diligence, which manifests in serious and frequent study of the latest findings reflects the moral

concern she has for her patient's well being. In addition, her false beliefs about the safety of a given drug are also based on judgments about which beliefs are best supported by the evidence. The problem for attributionism is that her belief, though false, is no less rationally related to the judgments she's made than the negligent physician's false belief is. There appears to be no relevant difference between the two cases on which the attributionist can ground the claim that the non-negligently ignorant physician is not responsible for her ignorance while also maintaining that the negligent physician is responsible for hers.

It might be objected that there is an obvious and important difference between the two. The negligent physician's ignorance is owed to her judgment that leisure is, in this instance at least, permissible even in light of the risks it poses to her patients. By contrast, the diligent physician's ignorance seems to be owed to judgments she makes about what she should believe in light of the best evidence. The false beliefs in each case trace back to a judgment, but the judgments are very different. My claim here is that the attributionist has not provided a principled reason for thinking that the false belief is attributable to the negligent physician but not attributable to the much more diligent one. To ground this claim, it is instructive to consider what attitudes are ruled in and ruled out by the attributionist's theory of responsibility. Here is Smith:

This rules out most sense perceptions, random thoughts, and mental images, appetitive desires, and "implanted" attitudes, since we do not expect these states to reflect or to be governed by our judgment. What gets ruled in, however, are ordinary cases of belief, intention, most desires, fear, indignation, admiration, and

guilt, among others...³³

This passage clearly shows that Smith's account of attributionism would be unable to deny that the diligent physician's false beliefs can be attributed to her. Since it is natural to think that there is an important difference between the two, namely that the negligent physician is, whereas the diligent physician is not, responsible for her ignorance, there is pressure to supplement attributionism in a way that preserves this intuition.

The attributionist response to these worries is to emphasize the fact that meeting the conditions for moral responsibility merely makes one open to moral appraisal without implying anything about actual blameworthiness. For example, Hieronymi makes clear in the following passage that she thinks it is a mistake to conflate moral responsibility, which turns on attributability, and blameworthiness (or praiseworthiness). She states that:

To be responsible for something is to be, on account of that thing, open to assessment and, depending on the outcome of that assessment, the appropriate target of certain responses. On such an understanding, one is responsible for things that are morally innocuous. One is open to assessment on account of them; the outcome of the assessment (in this case) would be neutral, and no particular reactions would be warranted.³⁴

The picture that is being revealed is of a two-step procedure of moral appraisal. First, in order to determine an agent's responsibility for a belief, attitude, or action, we assess whether it reflects the agent's judgments or assessments about reasons. Second, we

³³ Smith, "Responsibility for Attitudes," 262–263.

³⁴ Hieronymi, "Responsibility for Believing," 363, n.13.

determine whether an agent is blameworthy for one of these beliefs, attitudes, or actions that is attributed in the first step. As Heironymi makes clear, the outcome of step two – assessing someone *as* blameworthy, praiseworthy or neutral – is not a matter of attribution, which is to say it's not a matter of responsibility, though attribution is necessary for it. This move directly addresses the worry I expressed above that attributionists cannot distinguish between the negligent and diligent physician. They can accept that both are responsible for their false beliefs since their beliefs are a reflection both of their judgments about moral obligations to investigate and their judgments about what beliefs are best supported by the evidence they possess.

Since we have established that their beliefs are attributable to them, we can now ask whether they are culpable or blameworthy. It is at this point that the attributionists offer much less explicit guidance. There is an obvious difference between the physicians that could function as grounds for appraising each one differently. In the case of the non-negligent physician, the fact that her false beliefs about the safety of the drug is not traceable to any failure to take her investigative responsibilities seriously might lead us to appraise her ignorance as morally neutral. Her ignorance is not a reflection of the lack of moral concern for the well being of her patients, and so she would not be blameworthy for it. Nor would she be blameworthy for the act of harming the patients who take the drug. This is contrasted with the negligent physician whose ignorance was the result of the judgment that her investigative responsibilities were not of prime importance. Because the negligent physician's false beliefs stem from this lack of moral concern, she might be held blameworthy for it and for subsequently harming the patients who take the drug. On the basis of this difference – ignorant action that is rooted in the lack of moral

concern - the attributionist could maintain that both are responsible for their ignorance, though only the negligent agent is blameworthy for it. All of this is pure speculation about what attributionists would say about the blameworthiness of ignorant action since they do not provide a complete account of it. Indeed, in the context of a structurally similar case of moral ignorance, Smith argues that an agent will be responsible for the false belief that the pain and suffering of others does not matter morally. But, she states explicitly that attributionism does not speak directly to the question of the blameworthiness or culpability of the agent's moral ignorance. Indeed she states that:

(Attributionists), can acknowledge the existence of epistemic conditions when it comes to determining whether a person is blameworthy for her actions and attitudes; these conditions do not seem to be relevant to determining whether a person is responsible for her actions and attitudes, however.³⁵

The fundamental problem is that the conditions of blameworthiness (or praiseworthiness) are precisely what most philosophers working on questions of moral responsibility in general and on the epistemic condition in particular are trying to account for. At the heart of attributionism is a conceptual gulf between moral responsibility and the judgment that agents are either blameworthy or praiseworthy. That Smith countenances an epistemic condition for blameworthiness, which needs to be defended over and above her attributionist account of responsibility, reveals that her project and my own have different targets. Indeed, the attributionist may adopt the epistemic condition that I defend as their epistemic condition of blameworthiness while they retain their own theory of moral responsibility spelled out on attributionist grounds. In any event, attributionists like

³⁵ Smith, "Responsibility for Attitudes," 390, n.30.

Smith and Hieronymi must accept that an account of culpability for ignorance or ignorant action requires further theoretical resources than they offer. If my interpretation of their position is right, then the concerns I raise in this section may not function as an objection to their view but as a call for more theory.

CHAPTER 2: A QUALITY OF WILL ACCOUNT OF THE EPISTEMIC CONDITION

- 2.1 INTRODUCTION
- 2.2 ARPALY'S QUALITY OF WILL THEORY
- 2.3 THE QUALITY OF EPISTEMIC WILL VIEW
- 2.4 COMPARISON WITH RIVAL THEORIES
- 2.5 REPLY TO AN OBJECTION
- 2.6 CONCLUSION

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter I critically explored several attempts to defend the epistemic condition of moral responsibility, and I argued that each was flawed. In this chapter, I will defend my own account of culpable ignorance. In essence, I will argue that ignorance is culpable, and thus non-exculpating if and only if the agent's false belief is traceable to belief acquisition processes carried out with good will. More specifically, if an agent comes to hold a false belief via a process that does not display ill will or an absence of good will, then the ignorance will be blameless. This kind of blameless ignorance can function as an excuse, and agents who act upon it will not be morally responsible for her actions. I will also argue that agents whose ignorance is traceable to an ill will or the absence of a good will do meet the epistemic condition for moral

responsibility - their ignorance is culpable. Agents who act on culpable ignorance can be morally responsible so long as the other necessary conditions for responsibility are met.

Before mounting a defense of my view I will discuss the best recent attempt to defend an account of the conditions for moral responsibility for which the quality of the agent's will plays an important role. Arguments that an agent's quality of will is relevant to questions of moral responsibility have been a staple in the literature. The unifying theme present throughout is the claim that an agent's actions or attitudes are related to her *qua* agent when they reflect a quality of the agent's will. The reason why an agent is blameworthy for her wrong or bad actions is that the action stems from a will that is deficient in some way. Where this connection between the act and the agent's will is absent, there is room for excusing the agent. When the wrong act stems from manipulation by neuroscientists, for example, there is no salient link between the wrongness of act and the agent. Since, it is far beyond the scope of my dissertation to engage all of the quality of will relevant literature, I will limit my focus to theory of relatively recent vintage that has achieved prominence. In this chapter, I build upon Nomy Arpaly's quality of will account of moral responsibility, which draws heavily on the notion of reasons responsiveness. I will argue that her view fails to draw important distinctions between the culpability of ignorance and its rationality. The stage will then be set for me to defend my own view. It bears many similarities to Arpaly's account, but it incorporates the notion of epistemic norms. On my view, which I call the *quality of epistemic will* view, culpability for ignorance will depend on the agent's responsive to the reasons that ground epistemic norms and obligations.

2.2 ARPALY'S QUALITY OF WILL THEORY

Arpaly has recently defended an account of the conditions of moral responsibility that appeals centrally and explicitly to the agent's quality of will.³⁶ She argues that an agent's quality of will is to be cashed out in terms of her responsiveness to reasons. Agents are praiseworthy if they act rightly in response to the moral reasons that make the action right. This is a quality of will view because Arpaly simply equates acting for the right reasons to acting from a good will. Arpaly says that an agent is blameworthy if she fails to respond to the moral reasons that rule out acting the way she did. There are two ways that an agent can be blameworthy on her view. First, an agent can act wrongly from a lack of good will, which means that they act for reasons other than the reasons that support the morally right action. Second, an agent can act wrongly from an ill will, which means they act *because* of the moral reasons that rule out her action. Arpaly's disjunctive view can be summarized in what I call Quality of Will for Actions (QWA):

QWA: A person is blameworthy for a morally wrong action iff (i) she acts from a deficit of moral reasons-responsiveness (an absence of good will) or (ii) she acts for the reasons that make the action wrong (ill will).

Since Arpaly sees having good will as being essentially equivalent to acting in response to the moral reasons that justify the relevant moral requirement. An agent who acts from an absence of good will acts in a way that is unresponsive to those reasons.³⁷ On her

³⁶ N. Arpaly, *Unprincipled virtue: An inquiry into moral agency* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2003), Chapter three; N. Arpaly, *Merit, meaning, and human bondage: an essay on free will* (Princeton University Press, 2006), Chapter one.

³⁷ It is important to emphasize that she interprets 'acting in response to the moral reasons' in the *de re* and not *de dicto* sense. On her view, an agent's own beliefs about the reasons for which she is acting are not relevant to

view, there are two ways in which an agent can be unresponsive to the relevant moral reasons. First, the agent might not ‘perceive’ the moral reasons that her situation presents. This failure to respond is complete, in the sense that the moral reasons do not factor into her deliberations, conscious or otherwise. An example of this kind of absence of good will is an agent who simply fails to see that racial oppression is a moral issue. Arpaly’s example is of an overly paternalistic parent who simply fails to see the value of autonomy despite repeated efforts by others to impart it to her. In these two examples, the racist and the paternalist lack a good will because during deliberation and at the time of acting, they fail to see the relevant moral reasons for what they are. This type of unresponsiveness is contrasted with the second type wherein agents are motivationally, rather than perceptually faulty. An agent with this type of absence of good will perceives the moral reasons that are in play but is not sufficiently strongly motivated to act on them. Having registered that there are moral reasons, they act on other non-moral reasons that they take themselves to have. An example of this type is an agent who recognizes that another person will undergo substantial pain and suffering if she acts for self-interested reasons. Despite recognizing the moral import of this other person’s pain, the agent may still act selfishly and thereby betray a motivational rather than perceptual deficit. Arpaly’s own example is a roommate who makes a promise to mail a book and recognizes that there are moral reasons to keep the promise. We are to imagine that she decides not to mail it because it is quite cold outside and because she would rather finish writing her book. In both of these examples, the agent is not sufficiently responsive to

whether she is praiseworthy or blameworthy. Her position is motivated by cases where agents either aren’t aware of the reasons for which they act, or they are aware of them, but do not think of them as moral reasons. What is important is that the reasons for which she acts *are* the moral reasons.

the relevant moral reasons even though she perceives them.³⁸

As a general theory of the necessary and sufficient conditions for blameworthiness, Arpaly's theory should be applicable to cases where agents act from ignorance. One straightforward way of applying it is to include it in the ignorant action schema I introduced in chapter one. According to that schema, an agent is responsible for acting from ignorance when her ignorance is itself culpable. A quality of will theorist might then hold that ignorance is culpable only if, in forming and maintaining her beliefs, the agent possessed an ill will or otherwise lacked a good will. Since Arpaly understands quality of will in terms of reasons-responsiveness, an Arpalyan theory of culpable ignorance would look like this:

QWB (quality of will for belief): An agent's ignorance is culpable only if (i) she formed her beliefs via a process that was non (moral) reasons-responsive (indicating the absence of good will) or (ii) she formed beliefs via a process that was responding to the reasons that make the process morally wrong (indicating the presence of ill will).

To establish responsibility for actions on ignorance, QWB must be satisfied, and the following must be true:

EC: X is morally responsible for A-ing only if either X knew it was wrong to A, or X is culpably ignorant about whether it was wrong to A.

This is just a general statement of the epistemic condition for moral responsibility that was discussed in chapter 1. An ignorant agent is responsible so long as she satisfies the

³⁸ These two ways of failing to respond to reasons are also discussed by Fisher and Ravizza. The ability to perceive the relevant moral reasons is called 'receptivity', and the ability to conform actions to the perceived moral reasons is called 'reactivity'. See: J. M. Fischer and M. Ravizza, *Responsibility and Control: A Theory of Moral Responsibility* (Cambridge University Press, 2000).

conditions in QWB. QWB together with EC constitute one straightforward way of defending a quality of will-based account of the epistemic condition for moral responsibility. Although Arpaly does not spell out her view in exactly this way, I think that the theoretical elements I have just elucidated are faithful to her view.

In order to see how this account of culpable ignorance works in specific case, consider the negligent physician who is ignorant about how safely to treat her patient and whose ignorance traces to a motivational deficit. Imagine that she noticed that she had moral reasons to stay current on the latest research, but she was moved instead by her desire to watch a movie. Assume that because of this, the physician has a false belief about whether a particular common medication is safe. Also assume that the act of prescribing the medication was done from a good will. This physician is intuitively blameworthy for harming her patients, even though she wrote the prescription in part because she was concerned about her patient's well being. When the physician is in the treatment room, we can presume that she is responding the moral reasons to help her patient with her problem, in a way that would in most circumstances be praiseworthy. Because of this, the negligent physician's blameworthiness cannot rest her meeting the first disjunct of QWA, which states that an agent is blameworthy for an action if and only if she acts from a deficit of reasons-responsiveness. If the ignorant physician in this case is blameworthy for harming her patient, it must be grounded on something other than her reasons-responsiveness at the time she unwittingly gives her patient a toxic drug. The natural response to this is to focus on the quality of the agent's will at the time that she forms the false belief, which is precisely what QWB does. In this case, the physician plainly seems to meet the condition for culpable ignorance in QWB, since she fails to

react to the moral reasons that require her to stay current on her research. Though she noticed that there were reasons to take time out of her day and study, she wasn't sufficiently moved by them, and instead was moved by her desire to see a film.

So far, I have been considering a quality of will account of the epistemic condition in a fairly abstract fashion. I have tried to imagine what such an account would look like and the tentative result is expressed by QWB. In what follows I will look more carefully at Arpaly's explicit treatment of the matter of ignorance and moral responsibility. I will interpret her as offering an account of how an agent's quality of will might affect both the beliefs she will come to hold and her blameworthiness for unwitting wrong action on those beliefs. I will argue that her approach to these issues falls short, but that it paves the way for a better theory, which I explore later in the chapter.

2.2.1 Honest ignorance and motivated ignorance

Arpaly takes up these issues in a discussion of the contrast between "pure ignorance" and what I call motivated ignorance. She argues that a case of action on falsely held empirical beliefs is excusable if the false belief is "epistemically rational".³⁹ Although she does not provide an account of exactly what conditions a false belief must meet in order to qualify as epistemically rational, she suggests that it has something to do with responding to available evidence and deferring to reasonable epistemic authorities. Here is her example:

Boko Fittleworth (a character in a P.G. Wodehouse novel) overpowers and traps a

³⁹ Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, 103.

man whom he spots hiding in his would-be father-in-law's garden shed at midnight, because he believes the man to be a burglar. In fact, the man is not a burglar but a business tycoon whose presence in the shed is part of a secret, unlikely, and harmless plot in which the father-in-law is a willing participant.⁴⁰

Arpaly states that Boko's mistake is honest and because it is epistemically rational. The idea seems to be that there is nothing in Boko's motivational set that implicates him in his unwittingly trapping an innocent person. Given Boko's evidence, it was perfectly legitimate for him to believe that something untoward is taking place. I will return to Arpaly's discussion of honest ignorance below, but, first, I will discuss her analysis of motivated ignorance.

Arpaly's treatment of motivated ignorance also appeals to the notion of epistemic rationality. On my reading of Arpaly, the epistemic rationality of a belief functions as an indicator of the fact that the agent's ignorant action stems from either the presence of an ill will or an absence of good will. This is especially clear in her discussion of the false factual beliefs held by racists and bigots. Arpaly argues that the best explanation for why many racists hold false beliefs about the intellectual abilities of blacks is not that they are just making honest mistakes like Boko. Their beliefs are irrational "prejudices" that they hold because sinister motivations are affecting their belief-formation. Actions on such ignorance are still blameworthy because of the presence of this motive. When discussing the case of motivatedly ignorant anti-Semite who believes all manner of false things about Jews, Arpaly says:

⁴⁰ Ibid., 102.

“The anti-Semite mistreats the Jew because she wants to mistreat someone and is therefore ready to believe anything about the Jews, as long as it is bad. Thus the anti-Semite is not doing what she does because of an honest mistake, but because of a sinister motive.”⁴¹

In such a case, the anti-Semite’s ill will towards Jews causes her to believe all manner of falsehoods about them. However, Arpaly maintains that ignorance that is rooted in the presence of ill will does not excuse the racist or anti-Semite. An agent, who acts on such ‘motivated’ ignorance can be blameworthy for her unwitting action, provided there are no other excusing conditions.

There is a second way in which ignorance can be impure and potentially inculcating. This ignorance is not motivated by the presence of an ill will, but instead it has its roots in her failure to respond to moral reasons. Someone might come to hold racist beliefs, not because they possessed an antecedent hatred for blacks, but because they just don’t take relevant inquiry seriously. In these cases, the agent’s ignorance is traceable to what Arpaly calls a *lack of concern* for morality. She asks us to imagine an anti-Semite whose belief-formation processes are not motivated by antecedent hatred of Jews, but simply by a desire to fit in with her social group, all of which happen to be anti-Semites. When discussing this type of case, Arpaly states:

“If respect for persons is a deep concern for you – deeper than the desire to be popular with your anti-Semitic friends – you will think more than twice before accepting the view that Jews are not persons in the face of powerful evidence to

⁴¹ *Ibid.* p.106

the contrary.”⁴²

So rather than tracing back to the presence of a sinister will, the ignorance in this case is traceable to the anti-Semite’s lack of serious concern for morality. The notion of moral concern is central to this aspect of Arpaly’s account of moral responsibility. She seems to think that an absence of moral concern in cases of ignorance involves either the failure to notice the relevant moral reasons or the failure to be sufficiently motivated by moral reasons when one is forming and revising one’s beliefs. Thus, her account of moral concern bears a significant relationship to reasons-responsiveness. Indeed, the relation seems to be identity. At one point she states explicitly that she “takes good will to be the same thing as moral concern and as responsiveness to moral reasons”.⁴³ It follows then, by lacking moral concern, the second anti-Semite was not responding to the right reasons when she formed her beliefs about the qualities of Jews. If she were more responsive to the reasons that make anti-Semitism wrong, it would have been much more difficult for her to acquiesce in her belief that Jews were not persons. It is this lack of reasons-responsiveness that makes her blameworthy for her ignorant action.

2.2.2 Moral concern and epistemic rationality

As I mentioned above, Arpaly seems takes the notion of moral concern to be tightly bound up with epistemic rationality. If you have moral concern, that is if you are responsive to the relevant reasons, “you will think more than twice” before believing certain things on scant evidence or unreliable authority. Certain cases of ignorance are

⁴² *Ibid.* p.110

⁴³ p.79

“pure” because they are epistemically rational. In these cases there is no failure to respond to moral reasons that is fouling up one’s belief formation processes. Other cases of ignorance are “impure” on her view because they are epistemically irrational in a special way – agents come to hold a false belief because they fail to respond to moral reasons. This moral failure makes agents vulnerable to epistemic error. This connection between an important kind of rationality and reasons-responsiveness is an attractive feature of her view. It allows for the possibility of epistemically rational ignorance (Boko’s) that does not indicate a failure of reasons-responsiveness. It also captures what seems right about common sense cases of blameworthy ignorance. Agents who are less concerned about getting things right (the negligent physician or the impressionable anti-Semite) will be especially vulnerable to epistemic irrationality. Thus, Arpaly’s view seems to establish a salient connection between the ignorant agent and the wrong action. Culpable ignorance is irrational and traceable to the very features of the agent that justify ascriptions of responsibility in non-ignorant cases, namely the agent’s reasons-responsiveness. In what follows, I will argue that despite these attractive features, Arpaly’s account gets something importantly wrong. I will argue in the end that the connection she wishes to establish between the ignorant agent’s false beliefs and her reasons-responsiveness is too tight and fails to capture an important class of intuitively blameless beliefs.

Before raising specific objections to the quality of will view, I will first tease apart the notion of epistemic rationality and moral reasons-responsiveness in a way that begins to elucidate problems with Arpaly’s approach. Although the notion of epistemic rationality certainly seems relevant to the question of whether an agent’s ignorance is

exculpating, it is not entirely clear just what role it should play in a theory of culpable ignorance. In particular, if it is possible for epistemic rationality and moral reasons responsiveness to come apart, then the theoretical landscape might be more complex than Arpaly's discussion seems to countenance. Her discussion of the false beliefs held by racists and sexists suggests that their epistemic rationality is affected by deficits in their moral reasons-responsiveness. They form beliefs in epistemically irrational ways because they are not responding to the relevant moral reasons. This much seems exactly right. Arpaly suggests that the racist's and sexist's false beliefs are not honest (they are culpable) either because the cognitive processes that formed the beliefs are stunted by a sinister background motive (e.g. Hatred for Jews) or the cognitive processes that formed the false beliefs were affected by the agent's lack of sufficient moral concern (e.g. they just don't care that much about respecting others). Since she equates lacking moral concern with failing to respond to moral reasons, these cases involve the agent's believing in ways that are epistemically irrational because they are not responding to reasons that should influence their belief formation activities. Cases where agents are *both* non-reasons-responsive and epistemically irrational may get a grip on our intuition that the agent is blameworthy because the agent is doubly less than ideal – she exhibits both moral and epistemic shortcomings. But, since epistemic rationality and moral reasons-responsiveness are completely different categories of evaluation, what ought we to conclude about cases where agents fall short of one standard but not the other?

Unfortunately, Arpaly's view does not provide much guidance on these important cases. This is problematic, since it seems obvious that judgments of epistemic rationality seem to be based largely on the process by which agents form beliefs, and judgments that

they are not moral reasons-responsive are based on their capacities to recognize moral reasons or be motivated by their recognition. Epistemic rationality involves assessments of the agent's epistemic behavior, while reasons-responsiveness involves her capacities. Since these are assessments of fundamentally different capacities and dispositions, we should expect that they will vary independently of one another. More importantly, it seems possible and perhaps obligatory to evaluate an agent's epistemic rationality, given what her capacities are, limited though they may be. When agents are not capable of responding to the reasons for believing whether some complicated scientific theory is true, we might think that their beliefs, false or otherwise, are nonetheless rational given their limited capacities. Similarly, might it be the case that an agent can rationally hold a false moral belief despite the fact that they are not responding to the moral reasons that bear on the issue? I will now turn to an exploration of this question. To anticipate, failures to respond to moral reasons that lead to false moral beliefs can be rational in just the same way that failures to respond to existing evidence about complicated scientific theories are rational. I argue that once we have a clear understanding of these issues it will reveal important problems for Arpaly's account.

First, consider agents who are fully responsive to the moral reasons but who fall short on the dimension of epistemic rationality. For this case to stand apart from Arpaly's examples, the agents must have the utmost concern for morality, they must have some proficiency at perceiving moral reasons, and they must be sufficiently strongly motivated by them. This agent might nonetheless be epistemically irrational in some non-controversial sense. Agents who are thinking about how best to apply their moral principles, might make simple mistakes as they answer morally relevant questions, such

as what the likelihood that a certain bridge type will collapse or which charity will most effectively address destruction caused by a natural disaster. Even the most morally upstanding person is liable to suffer from memory lapses and the occasional invalid inference. How should the quality of will theorist handle cases of simple epistemic mistakes?

Before answering this, it is important to note that this class of cases differs from what Arpaly calls honest mistakes, which involve ignorance that is epistemically rational. Recall that given Boko's evidence, it was perfectly rational to believe something was afoot and that trapping the intruder was a reasonable response. By hypothesis, the agents who make simple mistakes are plainly not epistemically rational. Given their evidence, their beliefs are not rational. Though they made a mistake, they also seem not to possess an absence of good will (nor do they possess an ill will). Agents who make simple epistemic mistakes are interesting cases since their quality of will, understood in terms of responsiveness to moral reasons, seems to be beyond reproach. Rather, it is their 'quality of rationality', or 'quality of mind' that is substandard in such cases. Arpaly might simply grant that agents who respond to moral reasons, but whose ignorance is traceable to a simple epistemic mistake, are not blameworthy because they possess neither the absence of good-will nor ill will. But, this would require expanding the palate of blameless ignorance beyond honest epistemically rational mistakes. I do not raise these cases in order to argue that Arpaly cannot handle them. I only wish to note that they do not seem to fit the classificatory scheme she defends.

The second and more problematic class of ignorance also involves epistemic rationality coming apart from reasons-responsiveness. These ignorant agents are not

moral reasons-responsive but they are nonetheless epistemically rational, again, in some non-controversial sense. Recall that on Arpaly's view, these agents, simply by virtue of being non-reasons responsive will have 'impure' ignorance and will presumably be blameworthy for their acting on it. Cases like this have been at center of much discussion in the moral responsibility literature. Consider Susan Wolf's example of Jojo.⁴⁴ He was the son of a brutal dictator who was taught to disvalue the lives of members of his society's lower class. The reader is supposed to imagine that Jojo's (im)moral education was effective in the sense that he was not capable of recognizing the fact that members of the underclass would suffer under some oppressive policy as a reason not to implement it. He seems to be just blind to the relevant moral reasons that should influence him. For the sake of argument, we should also stipulate that he is not acting from an ill will in Arpaly's sense – he is not thinking about implementing the policy *because* it will cause members of the underclass to suffer. Gideon Rosen and Fischer and Ravizza have discussed similar cases.⁴⁵ These authors conclude that in Jojo-like cases, the agent's false moral beliefs are in some sense rational – given the evidence available to these agents, they make reasonable inferences to false moral beliefs. In these cases, the agents are plausibly thought to be epistemically rational for holding their false beliefs, despite the fact that they are not capable of seeing the relevant reasons as relevant or, as the case may be, dispositive. If an agent's quality of will turns on her ability to respond to moral reasons, and if part of responding to reasons requires recognizing those reasons, then agents like Jojo will be understood at least to have an absence of good will. The problem

⁴⁴ S. Wolf, "Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility," in *Responsibility, Character and the Emotions: New Essays in Moral Psychology*, ed. F. Schoeman (Cambridge University Press, 1987), 46–62.

⁴⁵ Rosen, "Skepticism About Moral Responsibility"; Fischer and Ravizza, *Responsibility and Control*, Chapter seven.

is that Arpaly's proposed treatment of these cases seems too insensitive to their epistemic rationality. At the very least, we might think that Jojo's ignorant action is less blameworthy, given that he's acting from epistemically rational beliefs. This move, however, is unavailable to Arpaly, since whatever else we say about Jojo's epistemic situation, he is still failing to respond to the rather strong reasons not to treat people the way he does. This 'absence of moral concern' is a fact about Jojo, not his situation, and so, Arpaly seems badly positioned to maintain that Jojo's blameworthiness is mitigated by the eminent rationality of his false moral beliefs.

This problem is more readily apparent in cases where the ignorance in question is not the result of moral insensitivity that was forged by a twisted upbringing. Some of our ignorance stems from the profound difficulty of getting things right morally speaking. An agent may try her best to consider all the morally relevant factors that her situation presents, and still have false beliefs. This possibility is readily apparent given widespread disagreement about what first order moral theory is the best. Assume for the sake of argument that utilitarianism is the correct moral theory, but that a philosopher named Kris has convinced herself after careful study that some version of Kantian deontology is right. Assume further that if Kris was to keep a promise to her friend that it would cause all manner of unnecessary suffering. Because of this, the right thing to do according to the true moral theory is not to keep the promise. However, Kris' Kantian predilections cause her to dismiss the consequences of lying as morally irrelevant given the importance of respecting her friend's rational humanity by keeping the promise. Kris, *ex hypothesi*, has a false moral belief, but given the fact that she came to it by carefully weighing the evidence and by striving to locate and weigh the morally relevant features

of the situation, it sounds strained to say that her belief is epistemically irrational. I take it as a given that for extraordinarily difficult areas of inquiry, false yet epistemically rational beliefs are the norm. In the moral case under consideration here, the agent's false moral belief will stem from being insensitive to the moral reasons that are relevant to the case – she simply failed to see that the outcome of the utility calculation was morally decisive. Kris is in many respects like the pre-Copernican astronomer who despite all of her dedicated work, failed to notice that a reorientation of the earth's position relative to the sun better explained the astronomic data.

Arpaly would be committed to the view that the Kris' ignorance is the result of her non-responsiveness to moral reasons. And, since non-responsiveness to moral reasons is equivalent with the absence of moral concern, Arpaly is also committed to saying that Kris lacks moral concern and would be blameworthy for acting on her false belief and failing to maximize utility. Arpaly must maintain these claims despite the fact that the false belief in question, that it she should keep her promise, is manifestly epistemically rational given how opaque the moral evidence is. She must maintain that Kris lacks moral concern despite the fact that she has given her life over to the rigorous exploration of moral questions. Arpaly's view seems to entail that only agent's who adopt the true first order moral theory will can avoid being un-responsive to moral reasons, which is equivalent to the claim that only true-believers will have moral concern. Agents who justifiably hold a rival moral theory will by definition lack a good will, and thus will be blameworthy for acting wrongly on the basis of their false beliefs.

I have raised several worries for Arpaly's account of blameworthy wrong action. The feature of Arpaly's view that is problematic in ignorance cases is her way of

understanding moral concern. Because an agent's blameworthiness depends so intimately on her moral reasons-responsiveness, problematic cases will arise wherein agents fail to respond to moral reasons but seem to be blamelessly ignorant. While the relevance of an ignorant agent's concern for morality seems *prima facie* relevant to assessing whether the ignorant agent acts culpably, it is not at all clear that Arpaly's proposal best captures it. When moral concern is understood as *de re* reasons-responsiveness, the bar is set fairly high. Although it seems to capture important cases of motivated ignorance and ignorance owed to intellectual laziness, it also impugns agents who, owing to the difficulty of getting things right morally speaking, come to hold a false belief about what morality requires. In the second half of this chapter, I will propose a refinement to Arpaly's quality of will view that avoids these problems.

2.2 Introducing the New Quality of Will View

In this section I will defend a modification of the quality of will view of the epistemic condition of moral responsibility. My account combines the core element of Arpaly's quality of will view, namely that an agent's blameworthiness is tied to her reasons-responsiveness, with the appeal to epistemic norms and duties that was central to the volitionist view that I discussed in chapter one. One of the most important desiderata for any plausible theory of moral responsibility is that it must connect the act, or more specifically, the wrong-making features of the act, to the agent. A straightforward connection of this morally salient kind is difficult in the case of ignorant action, because the agent may be acting ignorantly from non-vicious or even laudable motives. The clearest example of this is the negligent physician discussed above. When she is treating

her patients her proximal motive is to relieve the patient's suffering and improve the patient's health prospects. It is only by focusing on the physician's prior behavior that one locates her absence of good will. I agree with Arpaly that the best way of forging the requisite connection between the agent and the wrongness of her act is by reference to the agent's quality of will at the time she is forming beliefs. I think, however, that we must focus on the degree to which the agent fell short of epistemic duties or obligations. What I hope to show in this chapter and, indeed, over the subsequent three chapters, is that epistemic norms play an ineliminable role in any claim that an agent is responsible for unwitting wrong or bad actions.

As we saw above, there are important problems with Arpaly's treatment of ignorance and moral responsibility. I argued that her account commits her to the implausible position that agents who act from justifiably held but false moral theories are acting from an absence of good will. I contend that what is driving the intuition that such ignorant agents are not blameworthy is the idea that even though they are not aware of nor fully responsive to the actual moral reasons when they formulate their beliefs, they have nonetheless met all plausible and relevant epistemic obligations to which they are subject. If this is right, then the quality of will theorist should augment their view in a way that makes reference to norms and obligations that govern the way we form beliefs.⁴⁶ In a word, my theory is that agents are culpably ignorant if they failed to respond to the reasons underlying their epistemic obligations.

2.2.1 New Quality of Will View

The structure of my view is familiar by now. Like the volitionists, I will attempt to forge

⁴⁶ Arpaly argues explicitly against this move on *ibid* p. 109-110. I will discuss her argument below.

a connection between an ignorant agent and the wrongness or badness of her action by relying on the notion of epistemic norms. Recall that the volitionist's proposal was that ignorance is culpable when it can be traced to a witting failure to form beliefs according to what Rosen called procedural epistemic norms. The volitionist's view was that an agent who akratically fails to comply with one these epistemic norms is culpably ignorant. Although, my view is structurally identical to the volitionist's, I think that rather than requiring an akratic failure to comply with epistemic norms, we need only find a failure that occurred because of the agent's poor quality of will. The view of culpable ignorance that I will defend for the rest of the dissertation is:

QW: An ignorant agent is culpable for her false beliefs only if her ignorance is traceable to an epistemic norm violation that occurred because the agent lacked good will or possessed ill will.

I will follow Arpaly in identifying the agent's quality of will with her reasons-responsiveness. Substituting such an account of quality of will into **QW** yields the following:

QR: An ignorant agent is culpable for her false beliefs only if her ignorance is traceable to an epistemic norm violation that occurred because the agent either (1) failed to respond to the reasons that underlie the norm or (2) responded to the reasons that make non-compliance with the norm wrong.

Consider how **QR** would treat the negligent physician case. It is incumbent on physicians to keep abreast of new data regarding the risks and benefits of the treatment she regularly prescribes. Although this is vaguely formulated, I take it that the existence of this epistemic obligation is uncontroversial. When the lazy physician chooses to watch a movie rather than read through the latest journals, she is falling short of this epistemic obligation. In order to meet **QR**, however, it is not enough that she fall short. She must fall short *because* she is unresponsive to the reasons that underlie the epistemic obligation. It is this failure to see or react to the moral reasons that ground the epistemic obligation that establishes the requisite connection between the ignorant action and the agent. The precise content of these norms and the nature of the reasons that underlie them is a topic that I address in chapters three and four. For current purposes, however, we can assume that the epistemic obligation in question is an obligation to engage in the act of investigation and that it is supported at least by the risk of harm to patients of acting on false beliefs about the safety of the popular treatments. If the physician failed to recognize or react to these reasons, then she counts as unresponsive to the reasons underlying her epistemic obligations, and is culpably ignorant according to **QR**. In either case, the physician's ignorance is tied to her responsiveness to reasons.

It should be obvious that, so far, **QR** treats this negligence case in much the same way as Arpaly's quality of will view does. On her view and mine, the agent is blameworthy because of her failure to respond to reasons. The important difference is that on my view the relevant reasons are those that ground the agent's *epistemic* obligations that, when complied with, are supposed to diminish the likelihood of ignorance. On Arpaly's view, it is not necessary that reasons to which the agent fails to

respond underlie an epistemic obligation. This difference will have a significant impact in the discussion of several cases below.

One of the central advantages of **QR** over Arpaly's view is how it treats cases where agents have false beliefs that are in some important sense epistemically rational. I argued above that Arpaly's view lacks the resources to classify these cases in an intuitive fashion because an agent counts as non-responsive to the moral reasons and, thus, culpably ignorant, whether or not her belief is rational given her circumstances, experience, and store of knowledge. Her view just is not sensitive to the fact that there are central cases where epistemically poorly positioned agents are doing all that we could reasonably expect of them but still fail to recognize or react to certain reasons. On my view, the question of culpability for ignorant action turns on the question of whether the agent meets her epistemic obligations, not the simpler question of whether she failed to respond to reasons, full stop. In some cases, the very fact that an agent has met all of her epistemic obligations gives us a reason to classify any lingering false beliefs as rational. These cases are interesting because the agents may be responsive to the reasons to take their inquiry seriously, yet, while they are actually engaged in their inquiry, they fail to respond to certain reasons and come to accept certain false beliefs. As I discussed above, there are several circumstances in which this scenario is likely to arise. For example, in certain domains of inquiry it is very difficult to form true beliefs in non-lucky ways because of the opacity of the evidential reasons. As long as the epistemic obligations are not too demanding, it is possible, and indeed, it may be common, for agents to hold false beliefs, despite having done what could reasonably have been expected of them. The motivating thought behind my view, as expressed in **QR**, is that our assessments of

whether an agent's ignorance is culpable should be sensitized to their concern for getting things right morally speaking. If someone fails to form correct moral beliefs because they failed to respond appropriately to moral reasons, we cannot assume that they thereby lack moral concern. To the contrary, this failure may have occurred in the context of a period of sustained inquiry that the agent undertook in response to the moral reasons that support obligations to engage in such an inquiry.

Consider how this view treats the cases I discussed in section 2.2. Wolf's Jojo is ignorant about how people in his society deserve to be treated. As the case is described, Jojo's environment and influences have been so carefully controlled that it was nearly inevitable that he would come to hold this false belief. Importantly, this near inevitability follows from the fact that, barring some miraculous epistemic insight, Jojo was bound to believe this. The sense in which he was bound to believe moral falsehoods is that despite meeting all plausible epistemic obligations to which he is subject, Jojo would nevertheless be ignorant. Having met his obligations with respect to formulating and managing his moral beliefs, Jojo's ignorance fails to meet the conditions in **QR** and is thereby non-culpably ignorant.

It should be easy to see that my view also yields a different, and I would argue more intuitive verdict on the hard and controversial cases that philosophers routinely discuss. Recall that on Arpaly's view, the philosopher who still comes to hold a false moral belief, despite thinking deeply and carefully on the subject is still not responding to the right moral reasons. As such, their ignorance is culpable and they have no excuse should they act on it. My view generates the opposite verdict. The thinker who comes to the debate over whether active euthanasia is morally permissible with an open mind may,

through her investigations and reflections, meet all reasonable epistemic duties and still come to believe falsely. On my view this philosopher is like the 15th century astronomer who believed in a geo-centric cosmology – given the best attempts to gather and process the relevant evidence, false beliefs are to be expected. I would argue that in cases like this, that an agent holds a false moral belief do not reflect on who she is. The answer to the question why a given philosopher, who has met her epistemic obligations, holds a false moral belief should be that the domain of inquiry lends itself to such outcomes, not that the philosopher failed to respond to the reasons for holding the true belief. That would be akin to saying that the reason why the 15th century geo-centrist is not a helio-centrist is that she failed to respond to the reasons for believing helio-centrism. One promising feature of my quality of epistemic will view is that our assessments of culpability for ignorance reflect the better explanations for the existence of the ignorance. The best theory of culpable ignorance should establish a tight and morally significant connection between the agent, the ignorance producing action, and the ignorance itself. When facts such as the impenetrability of the domain of inquiry play such a significant role in explaining the ignorance, then there is reason to wonder whether such a connection has been established.

At this point, I must make a series of important promissory notes. So far, I have been using the term epistemic obligations ambiguously. There are at least two different applications the term ‘epistemic obligation’. One might think of epistemic obligations as obligations to hold certain beliefs in light of the available evidence or background beliefs. We appeal to this sense of epistemic obligation when we say the following: if you believe that it’s raining outside and you believe that your car window is open, then you ought to

believe that the inside of your car is getting wet. The ‘ought’ in this claim applies to an obligation to hold certain beliefs. By contrast, one might think of epistemic obligations as obligations to perform certain *actions* that have epistemic upshots. We appeal to this sense of epistemic obligation when we say: if you are going on a cross-country trip, you ought to verify that your tires are properly inflated. The sense in which it is an epistemic obligation is that the relevant action is required because of the value or importance of the belief likely to be formed by that action. Since I have not yet stated which type of epistemic obligation is relevant for the theory of culpable ignorance that I’ve proposed, it is difficult to assess the degree to which it is an improvement over Arpaly’s view, and indeed, over all the views I discussed in chapter one. In the next two chapters, I will take up this issue. In chapter three, I examine epistemic obligations of the latter kind, namely, obligations to perform actions with epistemic upshots, and in chapter four, I explore epistemic obligations to hold certain beliefs. In each chapter, the guiding question is whether agents who fall short of their epistemic obligations by failing to respond to the reasons that underlie them are thereby revealing a quality of will that licenses attributions of blameworthiness. In chapter five, I will return to a specific discussion of the new quality of will view, and I show how it is impacted by the conclusions I draw regarding epistemic obligations. In that chapter, I will also discuss how the new quality of will view will handle certain interesting cases of normative ignorance.

Before making good on any of these promises, I will close this chapter considering and responding to an important objection to the New Quality of Will view.

2.4 REPLY TO AN OBJECTION

The objection I want to rebut is the claim that there simply is no substantive difference between my view and an ordinary quality of will view of culpable ignorance. The quality of will account to which I am most indebted holds that an agent's quality of will just is her reasons responsiveness. The objector may maintain that my focus on responsiveness to reasons that underlie epistemic obligations does little to distinguish my view from Arpaly's. This objection can be buttressed by the argument that Arpaly's view can incorporate the epistemic norm and reason talk in a straightforward fashion. The reasons that support the epistemic norms will just be part of the class of reasons that determines the degree to which the agent is morally responsible. What I have put forward as my own view simply focuses the reader's attention to an extant feature of Arpaly's theory.

My first reply to this objection is that Arpaly does not take herself to be defending a theory in which epistemic norms play a prominent role. Indeed, Arpaly has explicitly disavowed this way of accounting for responsibility for ignorant actions. She writes:

Another claim I wish to avoid is the claim that we are responsible for our irrational beliefs in the way that one is responsible for "culpable ignorance" or criminal negligence – the view that we have a duty to "check on our beliefs the way that we have a duty to check the brakes on our cars."⁴⁷

Her reasons for rejecting the idea epistemic obligations or duties are relevant to moral responsibility is that "we do not even know which of our beliefs need checking more than

⁴⁷ Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, 109.

others".⁴⁸ I am not sure I feel the force of her objection, and she does little to develop it. One reason to reject it is it simply that it doesn't follow from her claim that we often do not know which beliefs to scrutinize that we therefore don't have any epistemic obligations at all. For example, it strikes me as uncontroversial that parents have obligations to investigate the safety profile of car seats and swing sets. Even if Arpaly is right that it is often difficult to ascertain which beliefs are more likely to be false, there are areas of our doxastic economy that obviously call for close scrutiny, given the obvious moral risks posed by ignorance. Her general skepticism about epistemic obligations seems unmotivated at best, and simply false at worst. I want to flag this passage as evidence that my own view stands as a marked departure from Arpaly's, at least on her own interpretation of her view.

My second reply to this objection is simply to elucidate the difference between my view and Arpaly's quality of will theory of culpable ignorance by reviewing the different verdicts that they yield for standard cases of ignorance. Recall the case of agent whose ignorance about what morality requires in a specific case survives deep and prolonged scrutiny. Assume that S believes falsely that it is morally permissible to Φ and that, given the weightiness of the issue, there is a fairly strong moral obligation to engage in just the degree and amount of moral reflection that she performed. On Arpaly's view this agent is not responsive to the reasons why it is wrong to Φ . Should she act on this false belief, her wrong action would be blameworthy according because the agent failed to respond to the reasons that make her action wrong. By contrast, my own view entails that the agent's ignorance is non-culpable since she did not fail to meet her epistemic

⁴⁸ Ibid.

obligations.⁴⁹ In this case, her ignorance is indicative of the difficulty of her epistemic situation rather than the quality of her epistemic agency.

⁴⁹ Of course, I am assuming here that the relevant epistemic obligation is the obligation to engage in the act of moral investigation and reflection and *not* the epistemic obligation to hold a certain moral belief. If there were an epistemic obligation to believe that it is wrong to phi, then, this agent actually would have fallen short of an epistemic obligation and would potentially be blameworthy for her ignorant action even on my view. This suggests, consistent with the objection that I am entertaining in this section, that there might not be much difference between Arpaly's view and my own after all. Again, a complete response to this must wait until I complete the examination of epistemic obligations and norms in the subsequent two chapters. By way of preview, I will argue over the course of the next two chapters that the type of epistemic obligation that is relevant to my view involve obligations to act not obligations to believe. This preserves my response to the objection that my view and Arpaly's are too similar.

CHAPTER 3: EPISTEMIC OUGHTS AND IGNORANT ACTION

- 3.1) Introduction
- 3.2) Transferring Culpability from Ignorance to Action
- 3.3) The Normativity of Epistemic Norms
- 3.4) Aim-Relative Actional Norms and Culpable Ignorance
- 3.5) Aim-Neutral Actional Norms and Culpable Ignorance
- 3.6) Conclusion

3.1. INTRODUCTION

Many theorists who work on moral responsibility argue that agents are culpably ignorant in virtue of falling short of some epistemic obligation.⁵⁰ If an ignorant agent acted wrongly or badly, and if we want to know whether she is morally responsible for that action, then it seems natural to inquire into the nature and origin of the ignorance. One burden of any account of the epistemic condition of moral responsibility that appeals to epistemic duties or obligations is to motivate and explain how epistemic failures establish the act-agent relation that is required for moral responsibility. How is it that the failure to comply with an epistemic obligation, which may come at a significant temporal remove from the subsequent ignorant action, shows that the agent is blameworthy for action done later? Indeed, one might hold the view that ignorance does excuse the agent from her wrong action, but that she is blameworthy for the prior ignorance producing action. One

⁵⁰ Rosen, "Skepticism About Moral Responsibility"; "Rosen - Tales of Ignorance and Responsibility - *Journal of Philosophy*"; Dana Kay Nelkin, "George Sher, Who Knew? Responsibility Without Awareness," *Ethics* 121, no. 3 (April 1, 2011): 675–680; Levy, "Culpable Ignorance and Moral Responsibility."

of the tasks of this chapter is to show how culpability ‘transfers’ from the ignorance itself to the subsequent ignorant action.

Another related burden on theorists who appeal to epistemic obligations is to provide a precise account of the kind of epistemic ought claims that are relevant to moral responsibility assessments in cases of ignorant action. This is no easy task, given the wide use that “epistemic norm” and “epistemic obligation” receives in the philosophical literature. These norms are multitudinous, and they can be sorted into several different classes. For the purposes of this discussion I will use the term “epistemic norm” as synonymous with “epistemic obligation” and “epistemic duty”. Evidentialism is a theory of epistemic justification according to which beliefs are justified so long as they are supported by evidence. This view of epistemic justification, when combined with the normative claim that it is in some sense better to have justified beliefs rather than unjustified ones, entails that it would be better for our beliefs to be supported by evidence. Alternatively, we might conclude that one *should* hold only those beliefs that are supported by evidence. Though this theory has its roots in John Locke⁵¹, W.K. Clifford captures it succinctly when he says, “it is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone to believe anything upon insufficient evidence”.⁵² There are many contemporary proponents of evidentialism.⁵³ Though there are subtle differences in the way that they would formulate the evidentialist epistemic norms, the following list⁵⁴ of norms would

⁵¹ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Penguin Books Ltd, 2004), Chap. XVIII, section 24.

⁵² William Kingdon Clifford, *Lectures and Essays* (Macmillan and co., 1886), 346.

⁵³ Roderick M. Chisholm, “Epistemic Statements and the Ethics of Belief,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 16, no. 4 (June 1, 1956): 447–460; Richard Feldman and Earl Conee, “Evidentialism,” *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 48, no. 1 (July 1, 1985): 15–34; R. White, “Epistemic Permissiveness,” *Philosophical Perspectives* 19, no. 1 (2005): 445–459; N. Shah, “How Truth Governs Belief,” *The Philosophical Review* 112, no. 4 (2003): 447.

⁵⁴ I hope that the norms I’ve listed below are non-controversial. Many of them are ‘common sense’ and many others have analogs in the literature on epistemic norms. For a nice discussion of these and other epistemic

likely be affirmed by each of them:

S should believe that p only if S's evidence for p is strong.

The degree to which S believes that p should be apportioned to S's evidence that p.

If S believes that the evidence for and against p is equally strong, S should suspend judgment about whether p.

If S is exposed to conclusive evidence that p, and if S has the capacity to respond to this evidence, then S should believe that p.

Other epistemic norms have a similar structure in that they also call for agents to hold a particular belief. They differ in that they are not so straightforwardly about the evidence for the truth of a particular proposition. Rather they seem to be norms of theoretical reason or theoretical rationality. Since the beliefs that we already hold have conceptual and logical relationships to other candidate beliefs, rationality might require agents to hold or refrain from holding certain beliefs, given their current stock of beliefs. For example,

If S believes p, then S should not believe not-p.

S should believe q if S believes p and if p, then q.

Still other epistemic norms require agents to perform certain *actions* that have epistemic

norms see: Andrew Chignell, "The Ethics of Belief," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Fall 2010., 2010, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2010/entries/ethics-belief/>; Christopher Hookway, "Epistemic Norms and Theoretical Deliberation," *Ratio* 12, no. 4 (December 1, 1999): 380-397.

upshots. These upshots might constitute evidence for a target belief or that might perform that affects what evidence she has. These are structurally distinct from the norms above, since what is required is an action. For example,

S should investigate whether p.⁵⁵

S should reflect carefully on whether p, when her belief that p is challenged by an epistemic peer or an epistemic authority.⁵⁶

S should defer to epistemic authorities.⁵⁷

Lastly, and more controversially, epistemic norms might be related to moral or prudential concerns. They might require that the agent hold certain beliefs if it would be prudentially or morally good for them to do so. They might also require actions whose doxastic upshots have prudential or moral import.⁵⁸ Consider:

S should believe that p, if S's life hangs on whether S believes that p.

S should believe that p, if an evil demon threatens to destroy all life unless S believes that p.

If S's believing falsely that p increases the risk that S will Φ , and if Φ -ing causes suffering, then S should be diligent about investigating whether p.

⁵⁵ Hall and Johnson, "The Epistemic Duty to Seek More Evidence."

⁵⁶ David Christensen, "Disagreement as Evidence: The Epistemology of Controversy," *Philosophy Compass* 4, no. 5 (September 1, 2009): 756-767.

⁵⁷ The literature on expertise and epistemic deference is vast. For a representative discussion of a norm like this see: Robert Pierson, "The Epistemic Authority of Expertise," *PSA: Proceedings of the Biennial Meeting of the Philosophy of Science Association* 1994 (January 1, 1994): 398-405.

⁵⁸ Again, the literature on pragmatic or moral reasons for belief is vast. For a representative sample, see: Andrew Reisner, "The Possibility of Pragmatic Reasons for Belief and the Wrong Kind of Reasons Problem," *Philosophical Studies* 145 (June 14, 2008): 257-272.

In listing out these epistemic norms, I am not endorsing them, nor am I committing to any particular view about their strength. I merely want to show that there are a substantial variety of epistemic norms. There are no doubt many ways one might try to group and cross-categorize these epistemic norms, and later in this chapter I will attempt to defend a classification scheme that is relevant to the issue of moral responsibility for ignorant action. My agenda for the rest of the chapter is as follows: In section 3.2, I state in the clearest terms just how an agent's falling short of an epistemic norm relates to questions of moral responsibility. In particular, I offer reasons for thinking that culpability for ignorance can be transferred to culpability for subsequent ignorant action. In section 3.3, I offer an account of the nature of epistemic normativity and the relationship between reasons and epistemic norms. This background is necessary in order to motivate the distinction between epistemic norms that require actions and those that require that the agent hold certain beliefs. In section 3.4 and 3.5, I discuss the prospects of two different kinds of actional epistemic norms for establishing an agent's culpable ignorance. I argue that, of the two, only aim-neutral actional epistemic norms are relevant to the epistemic condition of moral responsibility.

3.2 TRANSFERRING CULPABILITY FROM IGNORANCE TO ACTION

In this section, I hope to clearly articulate the theoretical burdens of any theory of the epistemic condition that appeals to epistemic norms. A central claim of such theories is that culpability for ignorant action is related to culpability for ignorance in the following

way:

Ignorant Action Thesis: Agents who act wrongly from ignorance are culpable for their action only if they are culpable for their ignorance.⁵⁹

The ignorant action thesis, is formulated in terms of wrongful action mostly because most of the extant literature on the epistemic condition, and indeed, much of the literature on moral responsibility more generally, focuses on cases of wrongful, bad, or, to a lesser extent, imprudent actions. I will follow this tradition, though I think that right, good, or prudent actions that are performed out of ignorance raise interesting issues that I hope to explore in future work. The ignorant action thesis manifestly reveals the pertinence of epistemic assessments to the question of whether she is responsible for actions. In cases of ignorant action, a necessary condition for moral responsibility is that the ignorance itself is culpable. For example, if an actor falsely believes that her gun is merely a prop, and if she actually shoots and harms another actor, she is morally responsible only if she is culpable for holding the false belief about her gun. Many theorists think that some sort of control condition must also be met in order to rule out moral responsibility in standard cases of manipulation, brainwashing, etc. Even if the actor's ignorance was culpable (perhaps she purposely allowed herself to become reckless about grabbing the prop gun and not the real gun because she was envious of her co-star's success), she would arguably fail to meet a control condition on moral responsibility if, just before shooting her, neuroscientists took control of her arm and trigger finger, and caused her to shoot her

⁵⁹ This formulation is explicitly found in Rosen "Skepticism About Moral Responsibility," and Smith, "Culpable ignorance." It is implicit in Sher, *Who knew?*; William J. FitzPatrick, "Moral Responsibility and Normative Ignorance: Answering a New Skeptical Challenge," *Ethics* 118, no. 4 (July 1, 2008): 589–613.; and Levy, "Culpable Ignorance and Moral Responsibility."

co-star repeatedly. In what follows, I will remain uncommitted to any particular account of the control condition or any other necessary condition on moral responsibility. What is important for present purposes is that so far as the epistemic condition is concerned, culpability for ignorant actions requires culpability for the ignorance.

The ignorant action thesis states that questions of culpability for ignorant actions turn on culpability for the ignorance itself, a claim that seems plausible on its face, but it does not *explain* why this is so. As I mentioned above, one of the tasks before us is to show how an ignorant agent who acts wrongly can be connected to the features of her action that make it wrong. While it is intuitively appealing to think that culpability for ignorance infects downstream actions on that ignorance, an actual argument is needed to support this intuition. After all, there seem to be many cases where culpability is ‘contained’ to specific actions or outcomes even when these outcomes play a role in later actions. In order to see this, consider the case of Esther. Assume that Esther is morally responsible for locking her keys in her car – she meets all relevant control and epistemic conditions with respect to that action. If in the next moment her house catches fire and she is unable to unlock it to let out her cat, is she culpable for not saving her cat? If she is not culpable for her cat’s demise, then we have a case where culpability remains ‘local’. Although Esther is morally responsible for being presently unable to unlock her door, this does not entail that she is culpable for an event that follows causally from this inability. If this is right, then we cannot assume that culpability for actions, ignorance, or whatever else automatically transfers to causally downstream wrongful or bad actions. So far, we have no *positive* reason to accept that culpability for ignorance will transfer to subsequent ignorant action.

If this case is not convincing, imagine instead that after culpably locking her keys in her car, Esther notices that someone placed a remote control on her front seat with a note telling her that a bomb will destroy her house and kill the cat unless she presses a button on the remote within five seconds. In this case, if Esther had not culpably locked her keys in her car, she would have been able to save the cat. Still, her inability to save the cat is traceable to her act of locking the keys in the car, for which she was responsible. It seems fairly intuitive that in both cases Esther is not culpable for being unable to save her cat and, so, not blameworthy for her demise. If these intuitions are right, then more needs to be said about why culpable ignorance is relevant to downstream actions on it. In both cases, there is a ready explanation for why we might want withhold the judgment that Esther is culpable for being unable to help her cat. In both cases, the fact that Esther was locked out of her car led to her cats demise only because of the terribly unlucky and unforeseeable situation that she found herself in immediately upon locking her keys in her car. Whether this is the right explanation for the fact that Esther's culpability does not transfer from her culpable action to subsequent ones is not a question I want to take up here. I am simply appealing to intuitions the reader might have about these cases and to the existence of plausible culpability 'localizers' in order to underline the need for a positive account of culpable ignorance that succeeds in transferring culpability to ignorant action. How can culpability for *ignorance* ramify in a way that make connects the agent to the wrongness or badness of her *actions*?

If one accepts the ignorant action thesis and affirms the view that culpability for ignorant actions is based on culpability for ignorance, then everything hangs on the account of culpable ignorance that one is ready to defend. For the rest of this section, I

examine the initial prospects of the theory of culpable ignorance that I favor and that figures in the account of the epistemic condition that I defend over the course of this dissertation:

Culpable Ignorance Thesis: Agents are culpably ignorant if and only if they violated some epistemic norm or obligation.⁶⁰

It is immediately clear, however, that the Culpable Ignorance Thesis, even if true, does not specify the nature and force of the epistemic obligations that are relevant to establishing the culpability of ignorance and actions on or from such ignorance. The first question to ask regarding these epistemic norms concerns the activity that they govern. As I see it, three options suggest themselves: purely mental activity, perceptual activity, and practical activity. All three kinds of activity can result in belief formation, preservation, or revision. Here, I will briefly discuss how each of these epistemic activities can be norm-governed. This will set the stage for the task of determining which norm type is relevant to the culpable ignorance thesis. As I emphasized above, this examination of candidate epistemic norm types should be guided by the need to show how culpability of an agent's ignorance, which is established by falling short of some norm, can transfer to culpability of her ignorant action.

The first norm type governs the entirely cognitive activity of modifying, preserving, and forming beliefs as one might do during an interval of reflection. After I have acquired new beliefs about when my flight is supposed to leave, I should modify my

⁶⁰ Something along these lines has been defended by: Sher, *Who Knew?*, 88; Rosen, "Skepticism About Moral Responsibility"; J. M. Fischer, "Recent Work on Moral Responsibility," *Ethics* 110, no. 1 (1999): 179–188.

beliefs about when I should arrive at the airport and whether I should expect traffic along the way. That this is a norm-governed endeavor should be obvious. Examples of the relevant epistemic norms include the requirement for consistency among one's beliefs and for carrying out certain valid deductive and inductive inferences. These norms govern purely theoretical reasoning, and their violation may lead to false beliefs. The central question for my purposes is whether ignorance that is traceable to such violations is culpable.

Another category of epistemic-norm governed activity involves belief acquisition that is more akin to perception. An agent in the presence of evidence for or against some belief should formulate or modify their beliefs accordingly. For example, if I am listening to a really loud concert, I should form the belief that the concert is loud. At the very least, I should, in the presence of my evidence to the contrary, cease to believe that I am in a quiet environment. This type of norm is distinct from the first in that it governs belief formation given that an agent possesses certain evidence. The first epistemic norm type governed belief formation given what other beliefs the agent has. One might say that the primary purpose of perceptual epistemic norms is to secure some degree of correspondence between the agent's beliefs and the world, whereas the primary purpose of the theoretical epistemic norms is to secure some degree of logical consistency or perhaps theoretical simplicity between and among an agent's beliefs. In either case, at this point, it is an open question whether violations of these perceptual epistemic norms are relevant to the culpable ignorance thesis.

The third and final epistemic norm-governed activity involves actions that an agent performs that have epistemic upshots. The most obvious example of this type of

norm would require agents to reflect, investigate, or otherwise attempt to acquire evidence. Examples include a pilot's obligation to check the landing gear and a job applicant's obligation to verify application deadlines. An agent who falls short of one of these norms fails to *act*, where the required action has epistemic upshots. I will call this class of norms *actional epistemic norms*. These norms are similar to the perceptual norms in that their primary purpose seems to be to secure a degree of correspondence between the agent's beliefs and the world. They differ in that this correspondence is secured via the *production* of evidence, whereas the perceptual epistemic norms secure belief-world correspondence via attention and responsiveness to evidence at hand. The activity governed by actional norms is purely practical, involving physical and mental actions that may eventually result in the formation or modification of beliefs.

This brief and admittedly rough classification of epistemic norms lays bare the various options for differing accounts of the culpable ignorance thesis. As might be expected, authors who accept something like the culpable ignorance thesis, and thereby acknowledge the centrality of epistemic norms and obligations, differ in their views about which epistemic norm violations are relevant. For instance, Rosen argues that an agent is culpably ignorant only if she is responsible for failing to act in accordance with some procedural epistemic obligations that led to her ignorance.⁶¹ On Rosen's account, the relevant procedural epistemic obligations are obligations to *act* in ways that have epistemic upshots. By contrast, Sher argues that an agent is culpably ignorant only if in becoming ignorant, the agent falls short of some applicable epistemic norm or standard.⁶² On Sher's account, the standards of awareness apply to the agent's perceptions, thoughts,

⁶¹ Gideon Rosen, "Skepticism about moral responsibility," *Philosophical Perspectives* 18 (2004), pp. 7-9.

⁶² George Sher, *Who knew?* (Oxford University Press, 2009), Chapters 6-7.

and beliefs. Before I can assess the merits of each position in this debate, we need to better understand the fundamental differences between the norm types. Rather than examining specific violations of each of these norm types in order to see whether the agents seem, intuitively, to be culpably ignorant, I think that the better approach is to dig deeper and explore what grounds or justifies these norms. Once we understand the nature of the normativity at stake for each of these norms, we will have a basis on which to judge what epistemic norm violations say about the agent. This exploration of the normativity of norms may seem like a departure from the question at hand, which is what kind of epistemic norms result in culpable ignorance, but, I will show that attention to these issues affords the best way of understanding how a culpability for ignorance can transfer from ignorance to subsequent action.

3.3 THE NORMATIVITY OF EPISTEMIC NORMS

I will call all norms that govern belief (all the claims listed above that end with some variant of “X should believe that p”) *belief norms*, and I will call all norms that govern actions with belief-upshots (all the claims listed above that end with some variant of “X should Φ ”, where Φ is understood to be an action) as *actional norms*. Since both of these are species of the genus *epistemic norms* and since I want to focus on differences between the two species, I will try to avoid calling anything an epistemic norm. With these preliminaries aside, it should be noted that the surface features of belief norms and actional norms are similar. As they are expressed in language, the norms share certain structural features. For instance, belief and actional norms require *something*. This feature of norms is significant because it classifies the norm as either belief (if the norm

says A should believe) or actional (if the norm says A should Φ , where Φ is some action). An agent falls short of a belief norm because of something she believes or fails to believe, and an agent falls short of an actional norm by performing or failing to perform some action. What makes it the case that someone falls short of a belief norm is different than what makes it the case that someone falls short of an actional norm. Recognizing this difference is an important first step towards coming to understand deeper differences having to do with the kind of normativity that lies at the heart of our epistemic obligations.

If we can get a grip on what justifies epistemic norms, or more strongly, what makes them true, we then we might be able to better identify which norms fit with the culpable ignorance thesis. The central thesis I accept is that all norms are underwritten by reasons. The account of the relationship between norms and reasons that I am inclined to hold is not universally accepted, but there is much to be said for it. Before getting clear on this relationship, I must discuss what I mean by the increasingly multivocal term ‘reason’. In the next several subsections I will discuss several central distinctions between reason types, and I offer a framework for understanding how norms earn their normative authority from reasons. Once I have done all of this background work, I will be able to argue that ignorant agents who fall short of a specific type of actional epistemic norm are failing to respond to the same kind of reason as someone who wittingly violates a moral obligation.

3.3.1 Reasons

For my purposes, I will follow Scanlon, Parfit, and others and conceive of reasons as considerations that standing in a triadic relationship between an agent and an action or

belief. The nature of this relation is difficult to explicate, though I accept Scanlon's suggestion that reasons *favor* the action or belief for the specified agent.⁶³

3.3.2 *Objective and subjective reasons*

Reasons, so understood, can be classified according to several different distinctions several of which are helpful for understanding how reasons can justify or ground epistemic or practical norms. The first such distinction is between objective and subjective reasons. Focusing for the moment on the realm of belief, if S is an objective reason for A to believe that p, S is given by facts that are distinct from A's other beliefs or desires. For example, the fact that it is raining outside is an *objective* reason for me to believe that it is raining outside, whereas my desire to believe that it's raining is not. By contrast, one of the agent's other beliefs might be a *subjective* reason for believing that p if it is given by one of her other beliefs. That I believe that it is raining outside is a subjective reason for me to believe that the streets are wet. In this cases, there may be no objective reason to believe that the streets are wet, if my belief that it's raining is false. The objective/subjective distinction works similarly for reasons for action. S is an objective reason for A to Φ , where Φ is an action if and only if S is given by facts outside of A's desires or aims. This distinction, which picks out two different 'sources' of reasons, will become relevant in subsequent discussion about different epistemic norm types.

3.3.3 *Normative reasons, motivating reasons, and coincidence*

Another relevant distinction is between *normative* reasons and *motivating* reasons. This

⁶³ Scanlon *What We Owe to Each Other* Harvard University Press Chapter 1. See also: Dancy, *Moral Reasons* and Derek Parfit, *On What Matters: Volume I* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2011).

familiar distinction allows us to differentiate between considerations that actually make some belief, desire or action good (the normative reasons), and the considerations in light of which the agent believed, desired, or acted (the motivating reasons). Dancy's helpfully characterizes this distinction as falling out of two different questions you might ask about a reason for action:

“There is the question what were the considerations in the light of which, or despite which, he acted as he did. This issue about *his reasons for doing it* is a matter of motivation. There is also the question whether there was a good reason to act in that way, as we say, *any reason for doing it* at all, one perhaps that made sense in the circumstances, morally required, or in some other way to be recommended... This second question raises a normative issue.”⁶⁴

Transposed to the belief case, we might ask what were the considerations in the light of which the agent believed something. Because it is awkward to characterize this an issue of motivation, since motivation seems intrinsically linked to intentional action, rather than belief, it should be clear that Dancy's question still applies. It is different from the question whether there are good reasons to hold the belief in question. It is instructive for my purposes to point out when normative and motivating reasons come together and when they diverge for a given agent and her belief or action. For the sake of simplicity, I will focus on a case of belief. Normative and motivating reasons come together in the case where an agent forms a belief that *p* by responding to the reasons that are normative reasons for believing that *p*. If the fact that the streets are wet outside is a good reason for believing that it is raining outside, and if it is my cognizing of this fact that leads me to

⁶⁴ Jonathan Dancy, *Practical Reality* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2003), 2.

form the belief that it is raining outside, then my motivating reason for holding my belief is also the normative reason to hold my belief. In the case of actions, if the fact that the streets are a good reason to wear galoshes, and if my cognizing this fact leads me to put on my galoshes, then my motivating reason for acting is a normative reason to act. The possibility of this kind of congruence plays an important role in philosophical discussions of epistemic justification – an agent’s belief is justified if only if she believes it on the basis of evidence, which is a type of normative epistemic reason.⁶⁵ It also plays an important role in certain theories of morally worthy action – an agent’s action is morally worthy if it is performed for the reason that makes the act right, which is another way of saying that the agent’s motivating reason for acting is the normative reason that makes the action good or right.⁶⁶

This coincidence between normative and motivating reasons frequently fails to obtain. Imagine that I believe that it is raining outside because a friend, who I mistakenly believe to be a reliable psychic, tells me, in the absence of any other evidence that it is raining, that her tealeaves indicate non-figuratively that stormy weather has arrived. Since this is not a normative reason for holding that belief, the motivating reason for my belief fails to coincide with any normative reason to believe. The relevance of the coincidence thesis to justification of belief is made plain by this example, since it seems that my belief is not justified in this case. In the case of action, Kant’s greedy shopkeeper fails to act for the reasons that make his action right since his concern for maintaining a healthy bottom line have nothing to do with the categorical imperative. The concepts of

⁶⁵ This theory of epistemic justification is typically called evidentialism. The definitive treatment of this theory is found in Feldman and Conee, “Evidentialism,” 24.

⁶⁶ J. Markovits, “Acting for the Right Reasons,” *Philosophical Review* 119, no. 2 (March 2010): 201-242; Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, Chapter one.

normative and motivating reasons are relevant for these and other important philosophical issues. I do not intend to challenge these formulations, and, indeed, I accept them and try to show that they can also be put to work in our understanding of the epistemic condition of responsibility. Although, I will not offer further good epistemic reasons to believe in the distinction, I hope to show that there are at least pragmatic reasons to accept it.

3.3.4 Reasons for belief and reasons for action

With the objective/subjective and normative/motivating distinctions on board, we can begin to understand the relationship that holds between reasons and ought claims. My thesis is that epistemic norms earn their authority from normative reasons that underlie them. Belief norms earn their authority from normative reasons for belief, and action norms earn their authority from normative reasons for action. These claims will only be illuminating if we already have some grip on what makes a certain consideration a reason for belief as opposed to a reason for some other attitude or action. Pamela Hieronymi recently developed an influential account of reasons for belief according to which reasons are considerations that bear on the question “whether p”.⁶⁷ Within the context of doxastic deliberation, wherein an agent is trying to figure out what to believe, the relevant considerations are those that would help them answer the question “whether p”. For example, if p is the proposition “Climate change is anthropogenic”, then the reasons for believing p are the considerations that would help us answer the question of whether climate change is anthropogenic. This would include facts such as “changes in CO₂ concentrations are linked to the recent proliferation of power plants” and “carbon sinks

⁶⁷ P. Hieronymi, “The Wrong Kind of Reason,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 102, no. 9 (2005): 437–457.

are unable to accommodate ramped up emissions”.

The underlying justification of actional norms is importantly different from belief norms. Actional norms are supported by reasons for action. Reasons for action call for agents to perform certain actions given the circumstances and other relevant facts about the agent, such as what her desires or plans happen to be. Again, following Heironymi, reasons for action are helpfully understood as considerations that bear on the question of whether to Φ , where Φ is an action. On this way of drawing the distinction between the two reason types, it is clear why reasons for action are important in practical deliberation. For example, when an agent is concerned with how to conduct herself given the risks posed by climate change, the relevant considerations are those that tell for or against doing things like buying a hybrid car and supporting climate-friendly public policies.

The interplay between reasons for action and reasons for belief is subtle and interesting. For instance, an agent who is deliberating about how to act will, if she is at least weakly rational, want to have true beliefs about the relevant alternatives. So settling the question of whether to act requires settling all sorts of questions about whether this or that proposition is true. So when deliberating about whether to buy a hybrid, one must first settle the question of whether to believe that climate change is anthropogenic. Considerations like “changes in CO₂ concentrations are linked to the recent proliferation of power plants” are relevant for settling whether to believe that climate change is anthropogenic. As such these considerations are reasons for belief. But, since the belief that is supported by this consideration is relevant for settling the question of whether to buy a hybrid, then it might be thought that “changes in CO₂ concentrations are linked to the recent proliferation of power plants” also count as a reason for buying a hybrid. As

such it would also count as a reason for action. It might be thought, therefore, that there is no significant difference between reasons for belief and reasons for action that could ground the distinction I am attempting to draw between epistemic norms governing belief and actional norms governing actions that have epistemic upshots.

The distinction between reasons for belief and reasons for action can be re-established by noting that, in the case described, the consideration that seemed to be both a reason for belief and a reason for action was relevant to the question of whether *p*, and the fact that *p* was relevant to the question of whether to act in a certain way. The consideration that “changes in CO₂ concentrations are linked to the recent proliferation of power plants” is relevant to the question of whether to buy a hybrid in a mediated way – it is relevant to the question of whether to believe climate change is anthropogenic, and this fact is what is relevant to the question of whether to buy a hybrid. If CO₂ concentrations had nothing to do with the question of whether climate change is anthropogenic, then it would not be a reason for buying a hybrid. Also, if the belief that climate change is anthropogenic was not relevant to the question of whether to buy a hybrid, then the consideration that “changes in CO₂ concentrations are linked to the recent proliferation of power plants” would not count as a reason for buying a hybrid. Some considerations seem to pull double duty by counting as reasons for belief and then also as reasons for action when the belief is relevant to whether the agent should act. But the sense in which these considerations are reasons for action is derivative. These considerations seem to pull double duty only because they are reasons for holding beliefs, and these beliefs are non-derivatively relevant for a given action.

3.3.5 Reasons and ought claims

With this account of epistemic reasons on board, we can understand belief norms as requirements that derive their normative authority from reasons for belief. This is a kind of buck-passing account since the normativity of the ought claim rests on the normativity of reasons that underlie it. The locution ‘given the evidence, one ought to believe that it is raining’ captures in plain language the thought that reasons for belief, in this case evidence for the belief that it is raining, support obligations to the relevant beliefs. In this case, we can imagine that there are strong, perhaps decisive, epistemic reasons to believe that it is raining. This tight connection between belief norms and reasons for belief is not universally endorsed, and there is a fascinating literature on the relationship between reasons and requirements or obligations.⁶⁸ Parfit seems to accept a buck-passing view of ‘ought’ in *On What Matters*. His position is that there is a sense of ‘ought’ that is intimately tied to normative reasons. Although he formulates it strictly in terms of actional oughts and reasons for action, his account should apply to belief oughts as well:

When we have decisive reasons, or most reason, to act in some way, this act is what we *should* or *ought* to do in what we can call the *decisive-reason-implying* senses. Even if we never use the phrases ‘decisive reason’ or ‘most reason’, most of us often use ‘should’ and ‘ought’ in these reason-implying senses.⁶⁹

Transposed to the belief case, when we have decisive reason or most reason to hold a

⁶⁸ Broome, D. (1999). “Reasons and Requirements”; Gert, B. (2009). *Brute Rationality*. OUP; Kolodny, N. (2005). “Why be rational?” *Mind*, 114, 509-563.

⁶⁹ Parfit, D. (2011). *On What Matters* (p. 33). OUP.

belief p , then we should believe that p . Dancy also defends a buck-passing view of ought claims and mounts powerful arguments against those who maintain that the buck cannot be passed from reasons to oughts.⁷⁰ While it is far beyond the scope of this project to mount a complete defense of the relationship between norms and reasons, I think there is strong philosophical precedent for such a view.

Since there are several different kinds of epistemic reasons, we might expect that a multitude of different epistemic norms, distinguished by the type of underlying epistemic reason. It is clear that motivating reasons, cannot ground epistemic norms, since their primary role is explanation rather than justification. Restricting our attention to normative epistemic reasons, we can recognize epistemic obligations that are grounded on subjective reasons, such as the agent's other beliefs and desires. That an agent believes that she is thinking may provide her with a decisive normative reason for believing she exists, and for this reason she might be obliged to believe that she exists. More controversially, someone might hold that an agent's strong desire to beat cancer may give her a decisive normative reason to believe that she will beat it, and for this reason she might be obliged to believe that will beat it. In both of these cases, an element of the agent's psychology functions as the normative reason that underlies the epistemic norm. This role can also be played by an objective epistemic reason. The example given above of the obligation to believe that it is raining outside might be grounded on the strong evidential reasons for believing it. If the agent has all the relevant evidence, and there is no reason to think she is being deceived, then we might hold that she ought to believe that it is raining outside. In this case, the epistemic reasons that underlie the epistemic norm are objective, perspective-independent facts about the atmospheric

⁷⁰ Dancy, J. (2004). *Ethics Without Principles* (chapter one). OUP.

conditions and the agent's location with respect to them. This last fact is important, since even really strong objective evidence for a given proposition might fail to establish any epistemic obligations for someone, if the evidence is unavailable to her.

There are also norms that require an agent to engage in some sort of belief-producing action. Since these are norms that require actions, rather than beliefs, they will be justified by normative reasons for action of either the subjective or objective type. If an agent strongly wants to have true beliefs about some subject, and if she has no conflicting desires, she might have an obligation to believe seek evidence or to reflectively on the strength of the evidence she already has. The basis of this epistemic norm is comprised by subjective reasons for action that are given by one of the agent's desires. By contrast an actional norm might be based on objective reasons for action. We might think that moral considerations having to do with avoiding preventable harm give an agent a strong reason to see whether her car tires are appropriately inflated. Both of these norms are similar in that they require actions that have significant epistemic upshots. In the first case, the underlying reasons are subjective, and in the latter they are objective.

This clearing of the conceptual space, though tedious and at some remove from questions of moral responsibility for ignorant action, will pay off in subsequent sections. The central question for this chapter and the next is which sort of epistemic norms are relevant to questions of culpable ignorance and moral responsibility. The remaining portion of this chapter will focus on whether ignorance traceable to violations of actional epistemic norms is culpable. I will first consider actional epistemic norms whose basis is subjective reasons for action. By way of preview, I will argue that agents who violate

these epistemic obligations are not culpably ignorant in a way that would establish moral responsibility for action on her ignorance. Then I discuss actional epistemic norms whose basis is objective reasons for action. I show that agents who fall short of these norms can be culpably ignorant and morally responsible for action on that ignorance. In the following chapter, I will discuss belief norms. There I will argue that, given the nature of the epistemic reasons that ground belief norms, an agent who falls short of such expectations does not thereby show that she has a poor quality of will.

3.4 AIM-RELATIVE ACTIONAL NORMS AND CULPABLE IGNORANCE

Investigation is a paradigm belief producing action about which we seem to have actional norms. We think that we have obligations to check the tire pressure before making a long drive and that people should keep track of the time if they have an upcoming appointment. Consider the example of an agent trying to settle the question of whether to check the time. This is an action that has a straightforward epistemic upshot. If an agent performs it, then, on the assumption that one's clock or watch is reliable, one will form a belief about what time it is. The question of whether to check the time can be settled by a variety of considerations. One class of considerations seems to be grounded in the agent's desires, goals, or plans. A true belief about what time it is will be relevant to someone who is baking a cake, running a marathon, or throwing a party. Certain desires, goals, and plans can ground reasons for checking the time. I will refer to reasons grounded in desires, goals, or plans as *aim-relative reasons*. A second class of considerations that can ground actions such as checking the time involves facts that are

not about the agent's aims. The clearest examples of 'objective' reasons are moral reasons. Consider, again, the child who has a curfew. This time, assume that the child is morally obligated to avoid unnecessarily worrying her parents and that her parent's will worry if she misses her curfew. Since a true belief about what time it is will trigger the child's memory of the curfew, and since she will avoid unnecessarily worrying her parents by remembering the curfew, we can say that she has a reason to check the time, even if at the moment in question she doesn't have an intention, desire, or plan to check the time. I will call reasons for action that are not grounded in the agent's aims *aim-neutral reasons*. These reasons to act are grounded in facts that are 'external' to the agent's desires or plans. They might involve moral reasons, as the example with the curfew suggests. But, they might also involve reasons related to the agent's well being. When we say that an agent has a reason to inquire into the reputation of a graduate program that she is considering, we might be appealing to an external reason of this kind. Williams famously discussed external reasons that involve the plans and desires of other people.⁷¹ These are still grounded in the desires and plans, so there is a sense in which they are aim-relative. However, they are still neutral with respect to the agent in question. This distinction is admittedly cursory, and it glosses over a huge range of debates about the source of reasons. The aim-relative vs. aim-neutral distinction will suffice for the purposes of understanding different actional reasons and the different actional epistemic norms they might support.

Now that I have distinguished between two types of reasons for belief-producing actions, we can now think about the actional epistemic norms to which they correspond.

⁷¹ B. Williams, "Internal and External Reasons", in *His Moral Luck*, vol. 1981 (Cambridge University Press, 1980), 101–113.

Aim-relative reasons for acting would support norms that call for a given action, so long as the agent has the relevant desire, goal, or plan. In the case of checking the time, the norm would take the form of a conditional: If someone desires to keep an appointment, then she should check the time. By building in the aim that grounds the reason for checking the time, the norm secures the appropriate application class – it does not apply to people who do not want to keep their appointments or to people who simply lack appointments. The same schema could be applied in order to discover other kinds of epistemic norms. Given an agent *S*, a desire, goal or plan *D*, and an action *A* with reliable epistemic upshot *p*:

Aim-Relative Actional Norm: *If S's D would be satisfied or completed by believing truly that p, and if S would believe truly that p by A-ing, then S should A.*

The central question is whether an actional epistemic norm of this kind is relevant to the culpable ignorance thesis and the ignorant action thesis. Are ignorant agents who fall short of aim-relative actional norms culpably ignorant, and does their culpable ignorance ground moral responsibility for subsequent actions on that ignorance? I think that the answer to both of these questions is no.

It is important to focus on the fact that the culpability in the culpable ignorance thesis is supposed to be transferrable and establish culpability for the subsequent action. I will argue that the features of the agent that are revealed when an aim-relative actional norm of this kind is violated, do not establish culpability for subsequent action on that ignorance. That an agent fails to comply with an aim-relative actional norm that is underwritten by aim-relative reasons for action such as those discussed above may reveal

something about the agent's ability to satisfy her desires, fulfilling her goals, or complying with her plans. Consider again the agent who wanted to keep an appointment, and imagine that she failed to check her watch, thereby falling short of the aim-relative actional norm requiring her to check it. If this agent has a false belief about the time, then her ignorance is owed to her failure to act in accordance with an epistemic norm, in this case, an aim-relative actional norm. Let's assume that she is culpably ignorant because she fell short of this norm. According to the ignorant action thesis, she would be morally responsible for any wrong action on the basis of that ignorance. The problem is that her failure to check the time in this case tells us only that she is disposed to act in ways that frustrate her desires or plans. That the agent possesses this disposition reveals that she suffers from a kind of prudential irrationality – she has certain goals and desires, and these desires function as the basis of actional epistemic norms that require certain investigations, periods of reflection, etc. But this sort of prudential irrationality is a poor candidate for grounding the claim that an agent is morally responsible for subsequent wrong actions on that ignorance. That an agent fell short of an aim-relative actional epistemic norm does not seem at all relevant to the question of whether she is morally responsible for subsequent ignorant action.

To see why this is so, consider the fact that agents form beliefs in prudentially irrational ways all the time. We frequently fail to investigate issues that are relevant to satisfying our desires or ends. People on diets fail to count calories, students fail to check paper deadlines, and mountain-climbers fail to check the weather conditions. There is a straightforward sense in which the ignorance that results from these epistemic failures is attributable to them. For example, we may want to criticize the dieter for not doing what

would further her dietary goals, but this criticism seems to be of an importantly different nature than the moral criticism that is directed at agents who are morally responsible for bad or wrong actions. Though these agents are falling short of aim-relative actional norms, this does not seem to bring the agent into contact with the wrongness of any subsequent wrong action in a way that justifies the claim that they are morally responsible.

Another way of understanding this gap is to focus on the agent's reasons-responsiveness. As I discussed above, the reasons that support the dieter's norm to count her calories are strictly aim-relative (on the assumption that she is not so overweight that she has health-related reasons to count calories). It is only because the agent wants to lose weight or improve her fitness that she has a reason to count calories. The agent who does not respond to these reasons is failing to respond to reasons she has and is subject to criticism. However, as I have been assuming throughout this dissertation, the reasons that someone fails to respond to in the case of wrongful or bad action, are not aim-relative in the relevant sense. They are not grounded in features of the agent's set of desires and goals. It is possible that an agent whose ignorance is owed to failures to respond to the aim-relative reasons that underlie aim-relative actional epistemic norms is otherwise a moral saint, perfectly responsive to all of the moral reasons that make certain of her options bad or immoral. In as much as questions of moral responsibility involve being responsive to moral reasons, an agent's responsiveness to reasons for investigating and reflecting that are grounded solely by her desires and goals is irrelevant to the question at hand, namely whether and when ignorance that is traceable to failures to investigate make agents responsible for their ignorance and subsequent wrong or bad

action. If this is right, then aim-relative actional epistemic norms are not relevant to culpable ignorance and moral responsibility.

A feature of recognizing this distinction between aim-relative reasons (with their corresponding norms) and aim-neutral reasons (with their corresponding norms) is that one can give accurate analyses of cases where an agent's ignorance is both culpable and traceable to aim-relative actional norm violations but where the culpability does not seem to rest on these norm violations. Consider an engineer who wants to perpetuate her good reputation in the industry by designing a highway overpass that is structurally sound. Because the engineer has this desire, she has an aim-relative actional epistemic norm to assess earthquake risk near the sight of construction. To fill in the details of the case, imagine further that:

- a. She fails to assess earthquake risk
- b. She maintains the false belief that there is no earthquake risk
- c. She designs an overpass that is not resistant to earthquakes
- d. Drivers are killed when the overpass falls during an earthquake

In this case, the engineer falls short of an aim-relative actional norm, forms or maintains a false belief and acts on it. Intuitively, she is morally responsible for designing a bridge that is earthquake susceptible and for the deaths of the drivers. If this intuition is reliable, then what reason is there to resist the claim that the engineer was culpably ignorant because she fell short of an aim-relative actional norm and that her blameworthiness for the deaths traces to this culpable ignorance? I think the reason is fairly clear, and it points toward an important feature of any viable account of the culpable ignorance thesis. Although it is true that the engineer has an epistemic norm requiring her to assess the

earthquake risk, this norm is supported by not merely by aim-relative reasons given by her reputational concerns, but by moral reasons as well. This epistemic norm is supported by weighty moral reasons having to do with risk of harm that her ignorance presents. It strikes me that one plausible explanation for the intuition that the engineer is morally responsible is the fact that the obligation to assess earthquake risk is underwritten by moral reasons, which themselves have nothing to do with the engineer's desires or goals. In this case, the aim-relative actional epistemic norm happens to coincide with an actional epistemic norm that requires the same investigation into earthquake risk. However, this second norm is underwritten by moral reasons that are neutral with respect to the agent's aims. In the final section of this chapter I will explore the possibility of grounding an agent's blameworthiness for ignorant actions on the violations of epistemic norms that are backed by moral reasons.

3.5 AIM-NEUTRAL ACTIONAL EPISTEMIC NORMS AND CULPABLE IGNORANCE

Aim-relative actional norms, which were grounded by 'subjective' reasons involving the agent's aims or plans, are naturally contrasted with actional norms that are grounded by aim-neutral reasons. Although the class of reasons that might ground this subclass of actional norms is large, for the purposes at hand, I will focus here on moral reasons.⁷²

Given an agent S, morally bad act or outcome B, and action A with reliable epistemic upshot p:

⁷² I am obviously assuming the falsity of an egoism according to which one's desires, plans, or goals do provide one with moral reasons.

***Aim-neutral Actional Norm:** If S would decrease the likelihood of performing action B by believing truly that p , and if S would believe truly that p by A -ing, then S should A .*

Consider the engineer case again. Had she done the proper risk assessment it would have diminished the likelihood of people dying due to an earthquake induced bridge failure. On this basis, it seems reasonable to think that the engineer was subject to an aim-neutral actional norm requiring her to perform the risk assessment. As I discussed above, aim-neutral actional norms are grounded on reasons that might have no significant relation to the agent's psychology. In the case under discussion, these aim-neutral reasons are moral reasons – having false beliefs about the prevalence of earthquakes in the area increases the risk of death and injury to anyone who drives over the bridge. If these reasons are strong enough to underwrite an obligation to investigate, then the lazy physician acts wrongly when she fails to undertake the requisite investigation. This strikes me as clear grounds on which to think that the engineer is culpably ignorant and blameworthy for the tragedy.

Still, we might wonder whether I have actually established that someone who violates a morally grounded actional epistemic norm is morally blameworthy. After all, the engineer in this case may have been negligent by failing to inform herself of the earthquake risk and blameworthy for *that* action – she should have assessed the risks but did not. Whether she is blameworthy for the subsequent ignorant act of building a structurally unsound bridge that contributed to injury is another question. Recall that the

culpable ignorance thesis that is at the heart of many accounts of the epistemic condition merely states that *ignorance* is culpable if and only if it stems from an epistemic norm violation. Here we are making the plausible assumption that the engineer did violate the aim-neutral actional norm to investigate earthquake risk. So, we are in a position to conclude that she was culpably ignorant. But, why think that this culpability will transfer to the subsequent wrong act of building a faulty bridge, an act that the engineer performed in ignorance? There is still a potential normative gap here between culpability for the ignorance-producing action and subsequent action on that ignorance. Bridging this gap also requires careful attention.

Fortunately, there are reasons to think that culpability can transfer from the epistemic norm violation to the ignorant action. To see how, we need only focus on the moral reasons that underlie the actional epistemic norm in question. Agents, who fall short of the aim-neutral actional norms that are underwritten by moral reasons, stand in a similar relation to their ignorant action as agents who wittingly act wrongly or badly. Consider the witting wrongdoer first. An engineer who knew it was wrong to construct an unstable overpass but who did it anyway plainly meets the epistemic condition for moral responsibility. There is no relevant ignorance that would function as an excusing condition, and there is no question about how she, *qua* agent, relates to the wrongness of her action. She is connected to the wrongness of her actions because she failed to respond to the moral reasons that make it wrong to purposely construct an unstable overpass. If we assume that the engineer does not meet some exempting condition, and that she meets any requisite control condition, then there seems to be no reason to withhold the attribution of blameworthiness.

But notice that the same reasons that make it wrong to wittingly construct an unstable bridge, namely the increased risk of harm to those who will drive on it, also ground the aim-neutral actional obligation to assess earthquake risk. The risk of harm to drivers underwrites both the moral prohibition against intentional endangerment and the actional epistemic obligation to assess earthquake risk. In falling short of this epistemic norm, the ignorant engineer reveals that she too is unresponsive to this *moral* reason. Because this parity exists between the reasons that make it wrong to wittingly design an unstable bridge and the reasons that support the actional epistemic obligation to assess earthquake risk, we seem to have a way of showing how culpability for ignorance can transfer to culpability for ignorant action. If an ignorant agent acts wrongly, and if her ignorance is owed to the violation of an aim-neutral epistemic norm underwritten by the same sort of reasons that makes her unwitting act wrong, then she seems connected in a salient way to the wrongness of the unwitting action. This connection is indirect - the unwitting wrongdoer's failure to respond to the moral reasons that make her unwitting action wrong occurs at some temporal remove from the unwitting act itself. It is during the ignorant agent's belief formation and evidence acquisition that her failure to respond to the relevant moral reasons obtains. What is most important for my purposes is that I have shown how an ignorant wrongdoer can bear the same relationship to the wrongness of her action as a witting wrongdoer bears to hers. If this is right then we have reason to think that the agent's culpability for her ignorance transfers to her subsequent ignorant action.

Before moving on to discuss the other epistemic norm type, there are two important points to note about the argument I just gave. Despite the parity that holds

between the witting wrongdoer and the culpably ignorant wrongdoer, there are two important differences. The first is that, intuitively, the magnitude of the wrong seems to differ between the two cases. Even though they both fail to respond to moral reasons involving the risk of harm, the engineer who wittingly endangers the drivers seems to be worse than the engineer who unwittingly endangered them, but who was culpable for failing to know that there was an earthquake risk. It is natural to think that someone would willingly neglect one's cognitive and investigational affairs but would never wittingly perform their negligent action. A mother might fail to verify whether her child's car seat is strapped in properly and thereby fail to ensure the child's safety. However, the same mother might be incapable of wittingly placing her child in harms way. Similarly, a physician who fails to stay abreast of the latest research would never knowingly give her patients drugs that would harm them. On the basis of this difference, someone might dispute my account of how culpably ignorant wrongdoers are connected to the wrongness of their actions in a way that grounds moral responsibility attributions. In response, I simply point out that the parity thesis does not entail that the degree of blameworthiness is merely a function of the type of moral reason flouted by the agent. Other factors may be relevant. The fact that the negligent physician would not wittingly harm her patients shows that there are some circumstances where she would be responsive to the relevant moral reasons. It takes a deeper failure of reasons-responsiveness wittingly to harm someone. It is deeper in the sense that, barring interference by others or failure to perform, you are acting with certainty that you will do something wrong. If, counterfactually, the unwitting wrongdoer knew with certainty, that her ignorance would result in harm to her patients then this might cause her to comply

with the norm of investigation. In this situation, the unwitting wrongdoer would be responsive to reasons. This provides a reason to think that the witting wrongdoer is, perhaps, more blameworthy for her action than the unwitting wrongdoer is. However, the fact that the unwitting wrongdoer is incapable of this kind of deep unresponsiveness is consistent with her being unresponsive to the moral reasons that underlie her epistemic obligations. Her connection to the wrongness of her action may not be as profound as it is for her witting counterpart, but the connection is there.

The second point I want to make regarding ignorance that traces to the kinds of investigative failures I discuss in this chapter is that my account is vulnerable to the regress worries that I discussed in chapter one. Rosen is a volitionist who maintains, in line with the account I've given here, that agents are culpably ignorant when their ignorance traces to failures to comply with "procedural epistemic obligations".⁷³ He recognized that many of these failures will themselves be ignorant actions, and thus, culpability for them will depend on whether the agent's ignorance about being under a given procedural epistemic obligation was also culpable. The account that I have discussed in this chapter is vulnerable to the same worry. An agent who falls short of an aim-neutral actional epistemic norm and becomes ignorant may have also been ignorant of the fact that they were subject to such a norm. In that case, it might not be so clear that her culpability for the ignorance that stems from the epistemic norm violation will transfer to the ignorant action. Indeed, her ignorance of the fact that she is subject to an epistemic norm might be blameless. It would certainly be odd to claim that an agent would be culpably ignorant for falling short of an actional epistemic obligation about which she was blamelessly ignorant. There are two ways to avoid this regress. The first

⁷³ Rosen, "Skepticism About Moral Responsibility."

is to accept that the story I tell in this chapter only works in cases where agents are not ignorant about their actional epistemic obligations. In other words, agents are culpably ignorant only when they wittingly fail to meet an aim-neutral actional epistemic obligation. The second is to claim that agents are culpably ignorant even when they *unwittingly* fall short of an actional epistemic obligation but that their ignorance of the epistemic obligation is culpable for some other reason. For instance, the negligent physician may not have believed that she was obligated to keep up with the latest research, but she *should have believed* that she was. This latter claim – that she should have believed that she was subject to an epistemic norm – points to the existence of the second class of epistemic norms I will discuss in my dissertation. Thus, a complete response to the regress worry will have to wait. I return to these issues in chapter five, where, to anticipate, I argue that culpable ignorance must be traced to witting epistemic norm failures.

3.6 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I tried to elucidate the role that epistemic norms plays for any account of the epistemic condition of moral responsibility that accepts the culpable ignorance thesis, which states that agents are culpably ignorant when they fall short of an epistemic obligation. By drawing on the distinction between reasons for belief and reasons for action, and the idea that reasons provide normative authority to norms, I introduced an important distinction between belief norms and actional epistemic norms. I then further distinguished between aim-relative and aim-neutral epistemic norms and argued that of those two, only the latter are relevant to the culpable ignorance thesis. My reasoning was

that aim-neutral epistemic norms can be justified by moral reasons, and that agents can violate these norms by failing to respond to moral reasons. In this way, they are importantly similar to agents who wittingly commit wrong actions. This shows that an ignorant agent whose ignorance is owed to a failure to respond to the moral reasons that underlie some actional epistemic norm is connected to the wrong-making features of her ignorant action.

Chapter 4: BELIEF NORMS AND CULPABLE

IGNORANCE

- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Norms of True Belief and Evidence
- 4.3 Dual Basis View of Belief Norms
- 4.4 Belief Norm Violations are Necessary for Culpable Ignorance
- 4.5 Dual Basis View and the Wrong Kinds of Reasons
- 4.6 Dual Basis View and Epistemic Worthiness
- 4.7 Defending the Modal and Ideal Claim
- 4.8 Moral Belief Norms: A Special Case?
- 4.9 Conclusion

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I will consider the relevance of belief norms to the culpable ignorance thesis. According to the distinctions I introduced in the previous chapter, belief norms are understood as obligations to hold, form, or maintain beliefs. I suggested that the most natural way of showing how these norms differed from action norms is by reference to reasons that underlie them. I proposed that obligations to believe that *p* are underwritten by reasons for belief or considerations that bear on the question ‘whether *p*’. My goal in

this chapter is to determine whether ignorance that stems from violations of belief norms can be culpable and related to that, whether agents who act on such ignorance can still be blameworthy for their wrongful action. For instance, if we were to claim that an ignorant agent was morally responsible because they *should have known better* true even when the only epistemic norm they violated was a belief norm? I already argued that such claims can be true when the relevant epistemic norm is an aim-neutral, actional epistemic norm underwritten by moral reasons. In this chapter, I will argue that the prospects are not as bright for agents who fall short of belief norms.

4.2 NORMS OF TRUE BELIEF AND EVIDENCE

In order to see if belief norms are plausible candidates for the culpable ignorance thesis – the view that agents are culpably ignorant if and only if their ignorance results from epistemic norm violations - I will start simply. This is perhaps the most basic belief norm:

Norm of true belief: X should believe that p, only if p.

I say that this norm is the most basic belief norm because it expresses the link between belief and truth in a maximally perspicuous way. Indeed, the norm of true belief is put forward as one way of understanding the idea that belief “aims” at the truth. Nishi Shah and others suggest that the question “whether to believe p” is best understood as

synonymous with the question “whether p is true”.⁷⁴ Falling short of the norm of true belief is easy to do; every agent who holds any false belief violates it. As such, it is a very strict belief norm. Consider facts about the number of moons orbiting Jupiter. Astronomers of the early 17th century, who were looking through the first telescopes, believed that Jupiter had 4 moons, a belief we now know to be false. Though their belief was based on the best evidence available at the time, Galileo and his contemporaries still fell short of the norm of true belief. Not much turns on this failure, however, if all we are concerned with is the evaluation of these astronomers as scientists. We think that one important measure of a scientist’s achievement is that the theories they develop and the observations they report conform to the best available evidence. That they fall short of the norm of true belief does not necessarily reflect on their scientific acumen.

Obvious problems loom for the culpable ignorance thesis, however. If the norm of true belief were applicable to the culpable ignorance thesis, then all false beliefs would be culpable. And if all false beliefs were culpable and if the ignorant action thesis is true, then every falsely believing agent is morally responsible for her ignorant action. This is wildly implausible, as it is just to deny that ignorance ever functions as an excuse. Thus, the norm of true belief is not pertinent to the culpable ignorance thesis, and I will set it aside.

Consider a different belief norm, one that was hinted at in the previous paragraph:

Norm of evidence: X should believe that p only if the available evidence on balance supports p.

⁷⁴ Shah, “How truth governs belief,” 447; See also: Hieronymi, “The wrong kind of reason”; Hieronymi, “Responsibility for believing.”

Though less strict than the norm of true belief, this is still a fairly strict belief norm. This norm is consistent with Clifford's famous dictum: "It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone to believe anything on insufficient evidence".⁷⁵ It is less strict because Galileo does not fall short of it with respect to his beliefs about the number of moons orbiting Jupiter. His belief seems to be supported by the available evidence and so it seems unmotivated to hold him accountable for getting things wrong. The norm of evidence is still fairly strict, however, because it is still easy to fall short of it. Human beings are notoriously bad both at acquiring evidence and at carefully weighing their evidence once acquired. Since many cases of intuitively culpable ignorance involve violations of this norm, it is not a non-starter for my purposes. Consider the parent who fails to remember whether her child is allergic to penicillin. On the assumption that the evidence supports the proposition that her child is allergic and that the evidence was at one time made available to the parent, this agent falls short of the belief norm of evidence. If this norm is pertinent to the question of responsibility for ignorant action, then according to the culpable ignorance thesis, the mother is culpably ignorant and is morally responsible for any harm that should befall her child upon the administration of penicillin.

Though the belief norm of evidence fails to yield counter-intuitive results in this case, it can readily be shown to be far too strong for our purposes here. Consider a variant on the allergic child case.

Neighbor's child: Joe's neighbor Sam once mentioned in casual conversation that

⁷⁵ Clifford, *Lectures and Essays*.

his son, Stan, was allergic to penicillin. Two hours pass, and Joe finds Stan with a laceration from skateboarding. Since Sam is still at work and since the laceration is bleeding profusely, Joe takes Stan to the ER. At the ER, the nurse asks if he is allergic to penicillin and Joe tries to remember if Sam ever told him about Stan's allergies. He remembers the conversation from two years ago but misremembers what Sam said. He tells the doctor that Stan is not allergic and the nurse administers penicillin, which harms Stan.

By believing that Stan is not allergic to penicillin, Joe clearly violates the norm of evidential belief. When he is at the ER, he believes, contrary to evidence, that Stan is not allergic. I have the intuition that in this case, Joe is not morally responsible for the harm suffered by Stan despite the fact that he fell short of the norm of evidence. After all, Joe was trying his best, and sometimes agents who are giving it their epistemic best will fall short of the norm of evidence. If this intuition is right, then the belief norm of evidence cannot be relevant to the culpable ignorance thesis. If violations of the norm of evidence were grounds for thinking an agent culpably ignorant, then we would be unable to distinguish between the parent's ignorance and the neighbor's. Since there does seem to be an important difference, the norm of evidence is also not pertinent to the culpable ignorance thesis.

So far, both belief norms I have discussed are too strong. Some agents who fall short of them are ignorant but not culpably so. Others fall short of the same norm, but do count as culpably ignorant. Thinking carefully about the differences between the parent and the neighbor yields two possible responses. The first is that the basis for the belief norm, by which I mean the considerations in virtue of which it is true that the norm is

applicable, differs in each case. The parent's ignorance is culpable because she fell short of the evidence norm that, in her case, is underwritten by both moral and epistemic reasons. As I discussed in chapter three, many actional epistemic obligations are underwritten by moral reasons. Similarly, someone might claim that the reasons why she should believe in accordance with the evidence is that the child depends on the parent to secure her well being and reduce the likelihood of avoidable harm. The parent falls short of the norm requiring her to believe in accordance with the evidence, but given her standing vis-à-vis the child, she has moral reasons to comply with the norm. The neighbor fell short of the exact same epistemic norm of evidence, but in her case it is underwritten solely by epistemic reasons. The relationship between the neighbor and child in this case does not provide moral grounds for thinking she should believe the child has allergies. This response makes sense of the contention that the neighbor and the parent are both not as they should be epistemically, since they each fall short of a norm that is supported by epistemic reasons. It also makes sense of the further contention that the parent is not as she should be morally, since, in her case, the norm of evidence is also underwritten by moral reasons. One of the central goals of this chapter is to explore this avenue of response. I will consider whether claims about what agent *should have known* or *should have believed* can be understood as having a foundation in morality rather than, or perhaps in addition to, epistemology.

The second response is to grant that the evidence norm in both cases is underwritten solely by epistemic reasons, but that the parent falls short of a further norm, namely one that requires parents to *act* in a way that diminishes the likelihood of having false beliefs about things that are relevant to the well being of their children. On this line

of response the parent's culpability rests not on her failure to believe in accordance with the evidence, but on an earlier failure to carry a partial medical record for her child. In the previous chapter, I considered the second way of establishing culpability for ignorance. There, I argued that agent whose ignorance can be traced to a failure to comply with actional epistemic norms requiring such things as investigation or reflection can be culpably ignorant so long as the actional norms are underwritten by moral reasons. In this chapter I am interested in accounting for the intuitive difference between the parent and the neighbor in a different way. Thus, I will now consider the prospects of the first proposal, namely that there are certain belief norms that are supported by moral reasons, or more generally, that these norms are another species of moral norm.⁷⁶

4.3 DUAL BASIS ACCOUNT OF BELIEF NORMS

The proposal I will consider is that certain agents who fall short of belief norms are culpably ignorant only if the belief norm is underwritten by both epistemic reasons and moral reasons. It is commonplace to talk about agents who stand in certain professional or care-giving roles as having role-specific obligations to act in certain ways. For example, doctors and parents should act in ways that is conducive to the well-being of those in their care. We also speak as if they have obligations to have certain beliefs or that they should avoid certain types of ignorance. For example, parents should know that their children need sleep and certain essential nutrients in their diet. It is important to recognize that these latter obligations are not necessarily obligations to act so as to ensure

⁷⁶ There is an interesting question here about whether it is possible for moral reasons to support a belief norm that is not also supported by epistemic reasons. Simon Keller and Sarah Stroud suggest something like this in their discussions of epistemic partiality. They hold that the duties of friendship may require us not to conform our beliefs to the best evidence.

that the agents have certain beliefs or avoid ignorance. Rather, they are obligations to believe. As I discussed in the taxonomy of epistemic norms in chapter 3, the verb that falls under the scope of ‘should’ is ‘believe’ as opposed to ‘act’ or ‘do’. In the case I have been discussing, the parent has an obligation to believe what reliable medical professionals have told her regarding her child’s medical condition. This belief norm is just a joint application of the more general norm requiring believers to believe in accordance with evidence and to defer to reliable epistemic authorities. The mother and the neighbor fall short of the same belief norm, but, since it is underwritten by moral reasons in the parent’s case, the parent’s ignorance is morally significant. This moral significance might form the basis for the claim that the parent’s ignorance is culpable and that she is responsible for any harm her child might suffer. In the neighbor’s case, culpability is blocked because, though she falls short of the same belief norm, it is not underwritten by moral reasons. Her ignorance is epistemically significant, to be sure. We think that it reflects on the neighbor *qua* believer, that her beliefs do not accord with her evidence. This merely epistemic failure is not morally significant and seems like a less viable candidate for establishing culpable ignorance. As a general strategy for figuring out which belief norm violations, if any, are relevant to the epistemic condition, we can simply assess whether the belief norm has a single basis in epistemic reasons, or whether it has a dual basis in both epistemic and moral reasons. Of course, the feasibility of the dual basis view depends on whether we can make sense of the idea that moral reasons can support belief norms.

Unfortunately, there are reasons to think that this dual basis view of belief norms is not feasible. The first simply that morality is typically understood to involve the

evaluation of *actions*. Most of our moral discourse and deliberation seems to be aimed at answering the question of what to do rather than what to believe. Moreover, most contemporary discussions of moral reasons conceive of them as considerations that favor a certain action.⁷⁷ Of course, many reasons theorists characterize reasons for belief in a similar way - as considerations that favor a certain belief. However general their account of reasons might be, when the discussion concerns moral value or moral wrongness, the relevant reasons seem to be exclusively reasons for action.⁷⁸ If this each of these reflections on morality is right, then how can we make sense of belief norms being part of morality? Additionally, if moral reasons are understood as reason for action, can moral reasons underwrite norms requiring belief?

One obvious line of response to this worry is to note that the sphere of morality includes non-actional elements such as character traits and emotions. In his defense of a position that is similar to the one I am considering here, Sher notes that, even granting that morality is primarily concerned with the assessment of actions, there is room for moral evaluation of other non-actional features⁷⁹. He says:

Because the standards in terms of which we assess people's traits, feelings, and attitudes clearly are offshoots of our moral scheme, it is evidently possible for the demands of action-guiding morality to ramify in many non-action-guiding directions.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, Chapter one.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 153.

⁷⁹ Sher, *ibid.* p. 113.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

If moral norms can require us to *be* generous or trustworthy, and if they can require that we *feel* disgust or shame, then there is no room for the argument that norms cannot require beliefs because that is to require a non-action. With this expanded account of what can be required by morality, we cannot rule out belief norms on the grounds that they are not norms of action.

This response to the worry that moral reasons cannot underlie belief norms is unsatisfactory. Simply pointing to the fact that there are types of moral evaluation that are non-actional is no positive defense of the claim that an agent's beliefs can be morally evaluated as well. The question confronting us is whether morality ramifies in a way that it includes belief norms. The answer to this question might still be no, even if we accept that moral evaluation ramifies to other non-actional domains. This is not say that what Sher says in the quotation is false. It certainly does seem possible for our moral scheme to expand beyond action evaluation. What we need are reasons to think that we should so expand it.

I think, however, that there is a central worry about extending or expanding morality so that it subsumes belief norms. It might be thought that the normativity of belief is already fully accounted for by epistemic reasons and that any inclination to think that there are moral reasons for belief norms is actually a conflation of a two distinct normative domains. I will refer to this as **the conflation objection**. Continuing with this line of thought, what seem like moral reasons for belief are actually moral reasons for *acting* in a way that provides us with evidence for a certain proposition. Once the evidence is acquired, however, our belief formation is governed by belief norms that call for forming beliefs in accordance with the evidence. In this second phase we are not

acting at all. We are simply forming beliefs in response to the evidence we now possess, and, ideally, we are forming beliefs in a way that conforms to belief norms. This is a two-step process that should be familiar – there are moral reasons that support performing evidence producing actions and there are epistemic reasons for forming certain beliefs given the newly produced evidence. This might be offered as an alternative proposal in every case where there seems to be a moral reason supporting a belief norm. For example, in the parent case discussed above, rather than hold that there are moral reasons that underlie the belief norm that requires true beliefs about the child's allergies, this alternative picture has it that the parent has moral reasons to act in a way that is conducive to maintaining her belief and that these actions provide her with evidence for her belief. This strategy, if it is workable, has the attractive feature of keeping two seemingly autonomous domains of normativity distinct. According to the conflation objection, the problem with the dual basis view of belief norms is not that moral reasons can only ground actional norms. Rather, the conflation objection shows that it is unnecessary to appeal to belief norm violations in order to establish that some bit of ignorance is culpable. In the next two sections, I hope to develop these claims much further.

In the absence of a positive argument for expanding morality in the direction that the dual basis view requires, and in the presence of the conflation objection, the idea that there can be belief norms are grounded on the same reasons as plain moral norms seems at best unmotivated and at worst stillborn. In the next section, I evaluate an attempt to make a positive case for including belief norms in the set of norms that are relevant to assessments of moral responsibility. This positive argument is that certain cases of

culpable ignorance can only be captured by appealing to belief norm violations. That is, there are cases where the fact that an agent fell short of a belief norm is a necessary condition for their being culpably ignorant. This is a direct challenge to the conflation objection. If it is sound, it lends support to the idea that the belief norms are a central component of morality and our discourse about moral responsibility. It supplies the necessary positive defense of the expansionist idea that there can be moral reasons to have certain beliefs.

4.4 BELIEF NORM VIOLATIONS ARE NECESSARY FOR CULPABLE IGNORANCE

The defender of morality-based belief norms might argue that there are cases of culpable ignorance that are not explained by locating a prior failure to conform to an action norm. If these cases exist, the agent's culpability *must* be grounded on the fact that she fell short of a belief norm. Two things about each case must hold.

- (1) The agents are ignorant, but still morally responsible for their ignorant action.
- (2) Their ignorance is not traceable to a prior actional epistemic norm failure that would have provided them with evidence against their false belief.

The first case I will discuss comes from Sher, though it should be stressed that he does not offer these cases as part of a defense of (1) and (2). I utilize them only because they are useful and imaginative. The first case is:

Hot Dog: Alessandra, a soccer mom, has gone to pick up her children at their elementary school. As usual, Alessandra is accompanied by the family's border collie, Bathsheba, who rides in the back of the van. Although it is very hot, the pick-up has never taken so long, so Alessandra leaves Sheba in the van while she goes to gather her children. This time, however, Alessandra is greeted by a tangled tale of misbehavior, ill-considered punishment, and administrative bungling which requires several hours of sorting out. During that time, Sheba languishes, forgotten, in the locked car. When Alessandra and her children finally make it to the parking lot, they find Sheba unconscious from heat prostration.⁸¹

Because she forgot, Alessandra is unaware that Sheba needs relief from the heat of the car. Since unawareness is a kind of ignorance, and since many find it intuitive that Alessandra is morally responsible for Sheba's condition, this case seems to meet the first condition above. Alessandra's ignorance about her need to remove Sheba would qualify as culpable only if she fell short of an epistemic norm of some kind. In this passage Sher seems to suggest that the norm is a belief norm:

“The reason Alessandra should have remembered Sheba is that she was under an obligation to protect the dog that she could not fulfill without remembering where the dog was.”⁸²

A norm requiring that Alessandra remember Sheba is probably best understood as a norm

⁸¹ *ibid.* p. 24.

⁸² *ibid.* p.111.

requiring an occurrent belief. Sher goes on to propose that this belief norm, which might be thought of as “purely epistemic” given that it requires a belief rather than an action, is “rooted in the “oughts” of morality and prudence”.⁸³ The relevant question for our purposes is whether (2) is true – whether there are no prior fallings short of an actional epistemic norms. If (2) is true, then the only epistemic norm on which Alessandra’s culpability can be based is the belief norm Sher mentions. In this case, however, it seems clear that (2) is false. In fact there may be several candidate actional norms to which Alessandra was subject, her compliance with which would have prevented her from forgetting Sheba. Both of these turn on the idea that Alessandra was engaging in risky behavior. The risk is constituted both by the hostile environment that Sheba is in and the fact that Alessandra is putting herself in a position where her memory of Sheba’s hostile environment is all she can rely upon. Presumably, the fact that Sheba is in the car and that Alessandra is inside the school precluded her from hearing Sheba’s cries of distress. Given this account of the risk Alessandra is running, the first actional epistemic norm that Alessandra violates is one calling for her to adopt some strategy that will aid her memory. She could simply say over and over to herself as she walks into the school not to forget Sheba. She could set a timer on her phone that would go off after a few minutes and almost certainly remind herself about Sheba. Less obviously, she could take carry Sheba’s playtoy in her hand, which would also function as a reminder. All three of these actions would have aided her memory and decreased the likelihood of forgetting Sheba. Given the gravity of the risk that Alessandra was running, it is more than plausible to think that she had such actional obligations. Since the actions that these norms require are belief-producing, these are standard examples of actional epistemic

⁸³ *ibid* p.112.

norms discussed in chapter three. The fact that Alessandra did not perform any of these actions contributed to her temporary lack of awareness about Sheba. Since there is an actional epistemic norm violation that leads to Alessandra's ignorance, condition (2) is false. Contrary to what defenders of morality-based belief norms might attest about this case, there is an actional epistemic norm violation that establishes Alessandra's culpability both for her ignorance and her subsequent omission.

It is crucial to note that it does not matter for my purposes here that Alessandra was not aware of these actional epistemic norms. The argument that I am objecting to holds that belief norms must be part of morality because there are cases of morally responsible ignorant agents whose *only violation* was that of a belief norm. In the case of Alessandra, there are plausible actional epistemic norms that she also violated, and so the claim that the belief norm violations are necessary is, so far, false. To object that the actional epistemic norms from which Alessandra falls short cannot ground her responsibility for her wrong action because she lacked awareness of them (the actional epistemic norms) is to impose a different kind of epistemic condition. These "searchlighter" objections could be raised against both belief norms and actional epistemic norms, and, while searchlighter views definitely merit discussion, that discussion is orthogonal to the problem of deciding whether belief norms or actional norms are relevant to the epistemic condition of moral responsibility. These matters can actually cross-classify. You can be a searchlighter and maintain that belief norms are relevant to moral responsibility, though of course you would have to knowingly fall short of these belief norms. Alternatively, a searchlighter might maintain that only actional epistemic norms are relevant. Yet another alternative is to deny the searchlighter

condition while maintaining that belief norms are relevant to moral responsibility.

Finally, one might deny the searchlighter view and affirm that only actional epistemic norms are relevant. What matters for my purposes here is to challenge the argument that belief norms are part of morality because they are necessary for explaining why agents like Alessandra are responsible for their ignorant actions. This claim can be challenged by showing that Alessandra also violated an actional norm, and the question of her awareness of the norm is irrelevant.

Another example that Sher discusses for which it would be natural to think that only a belief norm that is violated is:

Home for the Holidays: Joliet, who is afraid of burglars, is alone in the house.

Panicked by sounds of movement in her kitchen, she grabs her husband's gun, tiptoes down the stairs, and shoots the intruder. It is her son, who has come home early for the holidays.⁸⁴

As Sher notes in his discussion of Joliet, this is a straightforward example of negligent behavior. In cases of negligence, an agent's ignorance is enculpating because, although she does not believe that she was doing something wrong, we think that she should have believed this. Presumably, Joliet thought it was permissible to shoot her intruder without asking who was there, though, given the risk of significant harm or death that shooting them poses, it is uncontroversial to think that she should have known it was impermissible to shoot first and ask questions later. As stated, this is an example of a belief norm – it says that the agent should have believed that she was placing the intruder

⁸⁴ *ibid* p. 26.

at an unacceptable level of risk. The important question for my purposes is whether this norm affords the only explanation for Joliet's culpability. I think that the answer is no, since there are several actions that she could have undertaken that would have provided her with evidence against her belief in the permissibility of her actions. The most obvious example of this would be the act of asking the intruder to identify herself. It seems more than plausible to accept that in cases such as this, there is an actional epistemic duty of this kind on the gun wielder. Indeed, something like this norm is probably part of any gun safety curriculum. Since this actional epistemic norm exists, it is not necessary to appeal to a belief norm in order to ground Joliet's moral responsibility.

I have shown that in both of these cases there are actional epistemic norms that the agents fall short of, thereby obviating the need for the appeal to belief norms. We can establish that an agent's ignorance is culpable by reference to actional epistemic norms. In the two cases above, the agent's ignorance was easily traceable to some failure to provide oneself with evidential considerations that would diminish the likelihood of believing falsely. While I have only discussed two cases, I think there is a general lesson to take from them. The claim that we must appeal to belief norm violations in order to establish culpable ignorance is a very strong claim. Thus, it can be fairly easily undermined. Since it is not a further condition on any successful counterexample that the agent be aware of the actional epistemic norm is violated, then it should be fairly easy to show that one exists. This is obviously only a tentative conclusion for which I have provided inductive evidence. Thus, I would like to buttress my conclusion with a formula for discovering actional epistemic norms that correspond with the alleged morally-grounded belief norm. Take the target true belief and ask what action could the

agent have performed that would have decreased the likelihood of having that false belief. If that action is not profoundly dissimilar from other standard norms of investigation or reflection, then there will be an actional epistemic norm requiring that action. I say that it must not be profoundly dissimilar from other actional epistemic norms in order to rule out wacky ways of securing the relevant true belief. For instance, Joliet would not have an actional epistemic norm requiring her to install under her son's skin a special microchip that helpfully alerts anyone already in the house to his identity and presence. As I discussed above, a simple question should suffice.

One last argument can be made in support of my contention that there will always be an actional epistemic norm. Assume that for a given belief norm, that there is no action the agent could perform that would have decreased the likelihood of having the false belief. If there was nothing that the agent could have done that would have functioned as an epistemic aid, then there is an important sense in which her false belief cannot be attributed to the agent. If the reason that that prior actions are impotent in aiding the agent is that acquiring the belief in question simply outstrips the agent's cognitive or emotional capacities, then I think it is implausible to think that there is a requirement that the agent form the target belief.

In this section, I argued against the claim that belief norm violations are necessary for handling certain cases of culpable ignorance. This necessity claim was intended to show that there are cases where we are not conflating action norms, which are a non-controversial part of action-guiding morality and belief norms, which are not. If sound, it would have offered a positive argument for the dual-basis view about belief norms. Without this argument, the dual-basis view seems unmotivated. In the following

section, I argue that prospects are actually worse for the dual-basis view.

Before moving on to these other objections, I must address an objection to the line of argument I have taken in this section. It is simply that the agents in question might not have been aware of the actional epistemic norms that I enlist. Let's assume that I am right, and that Joliet, for example, was under an actional epistemic obligation to inquire into the identity of the person in her home. My claim that the appeal to belief norms is not necessary in order to capture cases of culpable ignorance is seems vulnerable to the challenge that I have merely pushed things back a step. Once again, the regress problem has reared its head. If Joliet was unaware of the fact that she should have taken steps to identify the person in her home, then it seems natural to ask whether *this* ignorance is culpable. Joliet's ignorance about her investigative obligations might trace back to a witting wrong action, in which case the regress can terminate without appealing to a belief norm. She may have chosen not to take the gun safety course, while she knew full well that she would be placing others at risk because she would be unaware of many serious moral obligations that come with gun ownership. However, in the absence of this witting refusal to learn about gun safety, she might still have been ignorant. In that case, it seems quite natural to claim that thought she did not know that she should have investigated the intruder's identity, there was a belief norm that required her to do so. In short, she should have known that she should have investigated. If this is a live possibility, then I seem only to have postponed the necessity of belief norms for capturing the culpability of Joliet's ignorance. The same worry can be transposed to the case of Alessandra. If her failure to set a reminder alarm on her watch was an unwitting failure, in the sense that she did not realize that she was under an actional obligation

requiring her to do so, we might be compelled to ground her culpability in the fact that though she did not know she should have set a reminder, she should have known. As with Joliet, Alessandra would have fallen short of a belief norm requiring her to know what her actional epistemic obligations were. In both cases, belief norms are still necessary.

Unfortunately, a complete response to this objection will have to wait until I consider the arguments of the rest of the chapter. If these arguments succeed, I will have provided independent reasons for thinking that the belief norms I just alluded to – norms requiring agents to believe that they are subject to actional obligations – are problematic. In chapter five, I will take this result and apply it to cases that are similar to Alessandra's and Joliet's. I will argue that there are strong reasons to doubt that culpable ignorance can be established via belief norm violations.

4.5 DUAL BASIS AND WRONG KINDS OF REASONS

In this section and the next, I will expose deeper problems with the dual-basis view that belief norms can be underwritten by *moral* reasons. The dual-basis view presupposes an account of moral reasons according to which moral considerations, and in particular, an agent's failure to respond to them, are relevant to the agent's culpability for having a false belief. A proposal such as this seems to run afoul of a variant of the wrong kinds of reason problem. In its most general form, the wrong kinds of reason problem identifies those reasons are appropriate for holding or forming certain attitudes and which are not. When the attitude in question is that of belief, there are certain reasons for which it is clearly appropriate to form a belief. To take an example that Hieronymi introduces, the

belief that the butler committed the crime is held for right kind of reason when the reasons for which the agent holds the belief are evidence for the truth of that belief.⁸⁵ Video footage of the butler committing the crime is pretty strong evidence for the belief in question. If my reason for believing that the butler did it is that I have seen the video of him doing it, then I believe for a reason that is, intuitively, of the right kind. By contrast, if the reason that I hold this belief is that it would be good for me if I believed it, then, intuitively, I hold this belief for the wrong kind of reason. That it would be good for me if I believed that p is not the right kind of reason to believe that p. If someone would kill me unless I formed that belief, then I seem to have a reason to get myself to form the belief, though I do not have a reason for holding it.

For the purposes of raising this objection to the dual basis view, I will adopt Hieronymi's explication of the wrong kinds of reason problem.⁸⁶ She frames it in terms of her own account of reasons. On her view reasons are considerations that bear on a question. A reason to believe that p is a consideration that bears on the question 'whether p'. Such considerations are called constitutive reasons for belief. The video footage of the butler committing the crime bears on the question whether the butler did it, and so the video is a constitutive reason to believe that he butler did it. Hieronymi contrasts this with reasons for believing that p that do not bear on the question 'whether p' but which still favor believing that p. In Hieronymi's example, we are to imagine both that an agent's life is in danger if she does not give convincing testimony that the butler is guilty and that the agent will succeed in this if she believed that the butler did it. In this case, the agent certainly seems to have a really strong reason to believe that the butler did it – her life

⁸⁵ Hieronymi, "The Wrong Kind of Reason."

⁸⁶ Ibid., 448.

depends on it – but this consideration does not bear on the question of the butler’s guilt.

Hieronymi calls reasons that favor holding a belief that *p* but that do not bear on the question ‘whether *p*’ extrinsic reason for the belief that *p*. This distinction is supposed to inform the distinction between the wrong kinds of reasons and right kinds of reasons for a given belief or other attitude. Constitutive reasons for believing that *p* are the right kind of reasons for believing that *p*, and extrinsic reasons are the wrong kind of reason for believing that *p*. She says:

“Extrinsic reasons are not really reasons for believing *p*, we can say, because they are not the kind of reasons which, simply by finding them convincing, one would believe *p*.”⁸⁷

An important feature of Hieronymi’s view is that attitudes are formed by settling questions. When we find a consideration that seems to us to bear on the question ‘whether *p*’ convincing, we form that belief for that (those) reason(s). Her claim is that extrinsic reasons for belief will never settle the question ‘whether *p*’, and thus are not the right kind of reason for which to hold a belief. In this explication of the wrong kinds of reasons problem, which I take to be the best and most sophisticated one on offer, Hieronymi provides a straightforward way of classifying reasons as the right or wrong kind for the attitude of belief.

These reflections on the wrong kind of reason problem provide the materials for an objection to the dual basis view of belief norms. According to the dual-basis view, there are moral considerations that count in favor of having true beliefs about some

⁸⁷ *Ibid* p.448.

morally weighty issues. In most cases, we think that parent ought to have true beliefs about her child's allergies. The moral consideration that seems to favor this belief norm is the risk of harming the child posed by the parent not knowing her child's allergies.⁸⁸ But, this underlying moral reason, namely the risk to the child of the parent's ignorance does not bear the belief required by the norm, namely that her child is allergic. Thus, the belief norm's underlying moral reasons are actually extrinsic reasons for holding the required belief. Since bearing on the question of whether the child has allergies is co-extensive with being the right kind of reason for believing the child has allergies, the child's risk of being harmed cannot be a reason for believing she has allergies, which is to say, it cannot be a reason for that belief. To be sure, this risk seems to be a moral consideration that counts counting in favor of *bringing herself to have* true beliefs about her child's allergies. The risk posed by ignorance bears on the question 'whether to secure evidence that would reduce the likelihoods of ignorance'. But, the dual basis view is a theory about belief norms. It should concern its proponents that agents, who complied with it for the reasons that underlie it, are forming beliefs for the wrong kind of reason.

An obvious reply to this objection is that this discussion of the wrong kinds of reasons problem is off target. The dual-basis view does not maintain that certain moral reasons could *be* epistemic reasons for a certain belief. If this was the proposal, then the wrong kinds of reasons problem seems fatal to the view. Rather, the dual basis-view states that moral reasons can ground an epistemic *norm* requiring a certain belief. It does not require that agents comply with the norm by forming the relevant belief for this or

⁸⁸ I am assuming of course that the parent is living at a time and place where children are regularly tested for allergies.

that reason. Indeed, one can consistently maintain that belief norms are underwritten by epistemic reasons and that agents should not form the required belief for these moral reasons, precisely because of the worry raised in the previous paragraph. Violations of these belief norms would still result in culpable ignorance on this view - the mother who fails to remember and thus fails to believe that her daughter is allergic to penicillin would be culpable for her ignorance and potentially responsible for any harm that she suffers. Furthermore, if she does comply with the norm by responding to epistemic reasons for holding the belief, then it is of no concern, since the dual basis view need not prohibit this. It is a view about what underlies requirements to hold certain beliefs, not a view about the reasons for which agents should form their beliefs.

4.6 DEFENDING THE MODAL AND IDEAL CLAIMS

The response in the previous section to issues about the wrong kinds of reasons is the best one for the proponent of the dual-basis view to make. It makes clear that the moral reason is supporting a belief norm but does not masquerade as a reason for the required belief. Though I think it is the best move available to the dual-basis defender, it brings another problem to the foreground. This way around the wrong-kinds-of-reasons objection highlights the fact that the moral reasons that ground or justify the belief norm are not themselves reasons for which the agent should comply with the norm. This seems to show that the wrong kinds of reasons worries have merely been pushed back a level. In this section I will raise two different objections to the dual-basis view. First, I will argue that if agents were capable of conforming to morally-grounded belief norms for the reasons that underlie them, then their beliefs would not be epistemically praiseworthy,

which is certainly an odd result for a theory of epistemic norms. Second, and more seriously, I argue that in fact agents simply cannot conform to these norms by responding to the underlying reasons.

These objections are more subtle but can be brought out by comparing the belief norms I have been discussing to their moral analogues - morally grounded action norms with morally grounded belief norms. In standard action cases, reasons that underlie norms, can function both as justifying reasons and motivating reasons. They are justifying reasons simply because they lend support to the norm. The ‘because’ in “an agent ought to Φ because of moral reason x ” is the ‘because’ of justification. The risk of harm to one’s child justifies the requirement to seek medical treatment when the child is ill. Whether this justification is sufficient to ground the norm is a substantive question that need not be resolved in order to distinguish justifying and motivating reasons. This same reason, namely the risk of harm, can also function as a part of the motivating reason for the agent. Although I introduced the distinction between motivating and normative reasons above, I need to say a bit more about what these concepts entail.

Motivating reasons are commonly understood to be the psychological states of an agent that explain her action. Michael Smith, for example, holds that motivating reasons to act are belief-desire complexes that motivate us.⁸⁹ Since motivating reasons, so understood, are mental states of the agent and justifying reasons are facts or states of affairs, the claim that a reason that justifies an action can become a motivating reason requires some argument. One way that a justifying reason can ‘become’ a motivating one, is when the content of the justifying reason finds its way into the content of the

⁸⁹ J. Kennett and M. Smith, “Philosophy and Commonsense: The Case of Weakness of Will,” *Philosophy in Mind* (1994): 141–157.

belief or desire that motivate us to act. For example, a good parent might form a belief that there is a risk of harm to her child if she fails to seek medical treatment, and will desire that the child not be harmed. The risk of harm in this example is a justifying reason – it justifies the obligation to seek treatment – and it is part of the motivating reason for the action that complies with the obligation – the parent both believes that there is a risk of harm and desires to avoid it. Furthermore, when we ask for an explanation of why this particular parent sought treatment, the answer is that she understood what the reasons for action were, which is to say that the content of her motivating reason included the content of the justifying reason. Of course, this correspondence between the justifying reasons and the motivating reason may fail to obtain without jeopardizing the intelligibility of the action. If the mother’s motivating reason for seeking care is constituted by her belief that there are eligible and desirable bachelors working as physicians at the ER, then the reason why she acted is not also the reason that justifies her requirement to act. But, although this lack of correspondence is common, and may be even be the norm, it does not dispute the modal claim advanced above that, where reasons for action and actional norms are concerned, the very reasons that justify the norm *can* be ‘internalized’ in the agent’s motivational structures. In my discussion below, I will refer to this as the *modal claim*. I plan to show that this claim cannot be made of belief norms that are grounded by moral reasons.

Before making this argument, however, I want to highlight another aspect of the distinction between justifying and motivating reasons that is relevant here. In addition to the modal claim that justifying reasons *can* become part of one’s motivating reason, it seems plausible to maintain that a central feature of moral discourse involves getting our

interlocutors to ‘internalize’ the justifying reasons into their motivational states. Not only do we try to get agents to see what the moral reasons are, we also try to get them to act for those reasons. We want them to comply with the norms *because* they recognize the underlying reasons. When an agent complies with an actional norm, but she is not acting ‘for the right reasons’, all is not lost, since there is still something to be said for compliance. Ideally, however, an agent does more than just comply with the norm. The literature on moral worth is helpful here. Julia Markovits has defended a conception of moral worth that she calls the ‘Coincident Reasons Thesis’.⁹⁰ She says:

“My action is morally worthy if and only if my motivating reasons for acting coincide with the reasons morally justifying the action – that is, if and only if I perform the action I morally ought to perform, for the (normative) reasons why it morally ought to be performed.”⁹¹

When Kant’s famous shopkeeper tells the truth to his customer because he is motivated by considerations having to do with honesty and respect, then his action has moral worth on Markovits’s view. Of course, this is on the assumption that honesty and respect are among the normative reasons that make it impermissible to lie. The shopkeeper’s motivating reasons for acting are coincident with the normative reason that requires so acting. Arpaly defends a stronger view according to which right actions are morally worthy only if they are performed for the reasons that make them right.⁹² It is stronger because coincidence between one’s motivating reasons and the relevant normative

⁹⁰ Markovits, “Acting for the Right Reasons,” 205.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, Chapter 1.

reasons is only a necessary condition. On Arpaly's view, an agent must meet a further condition in order for her action to be morally worthy. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to adjudicate this debate, but my objection to the dual basis view does not hinge on a particular one of these theories being true. The important point for my purposes is that something like the coincidence reasons thesis marks out a moral ideal in the case of action. In the following discussion, I will refer to this as the ideal claim. One question for the dual basis view is whether we would consider it an *epistemic* ideal if one were to comply with the morally justified belief norm via the internalization of the moral reasons that underlie it. The coincident reasons thesis, applied to the realm of belief, says that beliefs are epistemically worthy when and only when the reasons for which the agent forms the belief are reasons to hold the belief. I will argue below that this notion of 'epistemic worth' fails to obtain when agents comply with the moral belief norm 'for the right reasons'.

I have described two features of morally grounded actional norms. The first is the claim that one can act in accordance with the norm by making the justifying reason part of one's motivating reason. I will call this the *modal claim*. The second is the claim that agents whose motivating reasons are also justifying reasons are acting in an ideal way. I will call this the *ideal claim*. What I will now argue is that both claims are false for the proposal that belief norms grounded on moral reasons.

First, I will consider the modal claim. It should be noticed that the claim itself does not apply straightforwardly to the belief case. The modal claim is about the possibility of a correspondence between the normative reasons that justify a norm and the motivation of agents who comply with it. Since the concept of motivation seems to be

inherently linked to actions and intentions, it is simply inapplicable to the belief context. Securing correspondence between the justificatory reasons and the motivating reasons is already ruled out by the fact that beliefs do not relate in the right way to motivation. While one's coming to hold a particular belief surely does have psychological antecedents, these antecedents are not belief-desire pairs as was the case with action.⁹³ But, the explanatory aspect of the justification/motivation distinction can be maintained. The modal thesis, rather than being about a correspondence between the reasons that underlie the belief norm and the reasons that motivate belief, will instead be about a correspondence between the reason that justify the belief norm and the reasons that explain the agent coming to have her belief. Epistemologists call the relation that holds here between the reason and the agent's belief is called the *basing relation*. It is the reason on which the belief is based. The literature on the basing relation is concerned in large part with the idea that a belief is justified only if it is based on an appropriate reason.⁹⁴ For my present purposes, however, the basing reason that holds between a reason and a belief will function as the epistemic analogue for motivating reasons in the case of action. The relevance of appropriately based beliefs to epistemic justification will become more important in subsequent discussion on epistemic worth.

According to the dual-basis view, the reasons that justify some belief norms are moral. The risk of harm to her child is a moral reason that justifies the belief norm that the mother ought know what her child is allergic to. The trouble with this account is apparent in the context of the explanation of the mother's belief. When the mother

⁹³ The point I am making here will hold whatever account of motivating reasons one accepts. I utilize the belief-desire pair account just for the sake of consistency.

⁹⁴ For a comprehensive summary of different theories of the basing relation and their uses in epistemology, see Keith Allen Kozel, "Recent Work on the Basing Relation," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (April 1, 1997): 171–191.

believes in accordance with the norm, we are not inclined to explain her belief by appealing to the risk of harm to the child. *Her* reasons for believing that her child is allergic to penicillin are not going to involve facts about the risk of harm. The reasons that explain this belief might be that her physician informed her on a previous occasion and she accurately recalled this encounter. Maybe the mother placed a medical bracelet on her child's wrist that indicated her allergy. Both of these reasons explain why the mother has true beliefs about her daughter, but they are plainly evidential reasons rather than moral ones. They speak to the question of whether it is true that her child is allergic to penicillin. In the belief case, therefore, we find that the reasons why someone complies with a morality-grounded belief norm is typically not the moral reason that justifies it.

The problem runs deeper, however. According to recent work on the nature of belief, Hieronymi has argued that the nature of the attitude that someone forms in response to their reasons depends on the question that is actually settled by the reasons.⁹⁵ She maintains that it is constitutive of believing that *p* that considerations that bear on the question "whether *p*" settled the question for the agent. This is one way of understanding what it means to say that belief "aims at the truth". She discusses cases where agents seem to hold beliefs for what she calls extrinsic reasons, of which moral reasons is but one species. We are to imagine that a juror has self-interested reasons for believing that the butler committed a murder but is not convinced one way or the other by the evidence. For the juror, the considerations that bear on the question whether the butler did it do not settle the question for the juror. Rather, the fact that she has self-interested reasons does settle the question about whether it would be good to believe that the butler did it. She

⁹⁵ Hieronymi, "The Wrong Kind of Reason."

thinks that in this case, the juror does not believe that the butler did it; rather, she believes that it would be good for her to believe that the butler did it.

Applying this to the case of a belief norm grounded by moral reasons has troubling implications for the prospects of establishing correspondence between the reasons that underlie the belief norm and the reasons that actually explain the agent's belief. Since the moral reasons that ground the requirement to have true beliefs about *p* do not settle the question whether *p*, an agent actually *cannot* believe that *p* for those reasons. The mother is not in the state of believing that her child is allergic unless the considerations that bear on the question of whether she is allergic settle the question for her. Since the moral reasons that underlie the belief norm do not bear on this question, it follows that the reasons why she believes that her child is allergic cannot correspond with the reasons underlying the belief norm. Thus, the modal claim is false for morally grounded belief norms. This result is significant because the modal claim expresses a deep feature of the connection between morality and the agents that are subject to its purview. The reasons that provide the normative authority for morally grounded belief norms cannot figure in the agent's deliberation leading up to and securing norm compliance. Minimally, this shows that there is something peculiar about belief norms that are grounded on moral reasons. More seriously, it reveals a deep problem with this kind of belief norm. The reasons that lend it support are irrelevant for an agent concerned with complying with the norm.

The unattractive features of this view are brought into greater focus when we turn to the issue of advice and the epistemic analog of moral worth. With regard to epistemic advice, if an agent's interlocutor is concerned with getting an agent to believe a certain

proposition so that she would comply with a morally grounded belief norm, the interlocutor would not draw the agent's attention to the moral reasons that do the grounding. If, for instance we were trying to get the parent to hold true beliefs about her child's allergies, we would adduce evidence for the proposition that she is allergic to penicillin. We would not get anywhere by pointing out to them that there are strong moral reasons concerning risk to the child if they should have false beliefs. By alluding to and emphasizing the moral reasons, the interlocutor might succeed in getting the parent to *act* in ways that would help them remember their child's allergies, but again these actions would involve producing evidence for the belief. The standard model for giving advice simply does not apply in the case of morally grounded belief norms.

Similar issues arise for the question of epistemic worth. As I alluded to briefly above, there is an epistemic analog to the concept of moral worth according to which a belief is worthy if it is believed for the right reasons. Compare the following two agents both of whom believe that climbing Mt. Everest is dangerous. Mike is runs an expedition outfit that regularly guides adventurous alpinists to the summit of Everest. His belief that climbing Mt. Everest is dangerous is based on a wealth of experience and his having undertaken a serious study of the atmospheric conditions on the mountain and the typical human physiological responses to such condition. His belief complies with many different epistemic norms, and the reasons for which he believes are both strong and multifarious. Because his belief is based on such reasons, we might say that his belief has a significant degree of epistemic worth. Indeed, influential theories of epistemic justification hold roughly that what it is for a belief to be justified is for it to be based on

the right kinds of reasons.⁹⁶ Things are markedly different with Page. His belief that Everest is dangerous is based on a story that a new age-y friend told him about protective mountain gods who try to minimize encroachments on their holy space by placing a curse on every climber who attempts to summit. This curse is supposed to be the reason why climbers have such a hard time climbing the mountain. Page's belief that climbing Everest is dangerous, though true, is based on really bad reasons. Page has a true belief, but there is a sense in which it does not merit epistemic praise. Just as actions have moral worth to the degree that they are performed for the right reasons, beliefs have epistemic worth to the degree that they are believed for the right reasons.

The situation is very different for agents who are subject to a belief norm that is grounded by moral reasons. Earlier, I argued that agents couldn't believe that *p* for moral reasons because the moral reasons cannot settle the question of whether *p* is true. If we assume that my argument failed and that moral considerations can settle the question of whether *p* for a given agent, then we can ask whether that agent's belief has epistemic worth. Although it is difficult to even comprehend how an agent might form a belief by responding to moral reasons, imagine that a third outfitter named Jon, who is also planning on starting an Everest outfitting company, thinks that the fact that his customer's well being is in his hands provides him with a strong moral reason to have true beliefs about the risks involved with an Everest summit attempt. We can imagine a case where Jon, because of some strange inclination toward pessimism and risk aversion, reflects on the moral reasons (his future customers' well being) and somehow forms the belief that climbing Everest is dangerous. For this case to work, he must form this belief

⁹⁶ Keith Allen Korcz, "The Epistemic Basing Relation", n.d., <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/basing-epistemic/#BasRelEpi>.

only for the moral reasons that support the belief norm requiring him to have true beliefs. Imagine that Jon possesses a reliable introspective faculty and that when asked why he believes climbing Everest is dangerous, his answer is that his future clients' well being is in his hands. The question before us is whether Jon's belief is more similar to Mike's or Page's. My intuition is that Jon's belief is more similar to Page's. Both of their beliefs are based on considerations that are plainly non-evidential. In Page's case it is based on hearsay from an unreliable source, and in Jon's case it is based, rather inexplicably, on his belief about risks to future customers. This result is significant because it shows that belief norms that are grounded on moral, rather than epistemic reasons have the peculiar property that agents who comply with them by responding to the reasons that underlie them are in doing something wrong. Their beliefs have no epistemic worth as I have been discussing it.

Before moving on to discuss a class of beliefs that might avoid the problems I raise for the dual-basis view, I want to quickly take stock. First, I suggested that the dual-basis proponent fell victim to the wrong kinds of reasons objection. After some clarifications, I showed the wrong kinds of reasons objection as typically posed against non-evidential beliefs was not a real threat to the dual-basis view, but that there are two related problems. The first, which I called the modal claim, was that agents cannot comply with the belief norm for the reasons that underlie it. This followed both from a plausible view about the nature of belief and from the notion that moral reasons that might ground an alleged obligation to believe that *p* would not be capable of settling the question whether *p*. The second, which I called the ideal claim, stated that *per impossible* agents who could bring them selves to hold the requisite belief by responding to moral

reasons would not hold a belief that had epistemic worth. These objections, if successful, show that there are strong reasons to doubt that belief norms fall under the extension of ‘moral norms’. In chapter five, I will discuss the implications of this in more detail.

4.7 MORAL BELIEF NORMS: A SPECIAL CASE?

In this section, I will discuss a class of belief norms that appear not to be vulnerable to the previous objections. The problems with morally grounded belief norms stem from the fact that their underling justification is moral even though their command is epistemic. Might this disconnect be avoided if the belief that the norm requires is about morality? Do the worries that I raised in the previous chapter apply to a belief norm that, for example, required us to believe that it is wrong to torture a cat for fun? In order for this example to get off the ground, I must assume a metaethical framework according to which there is evidence for certain moral claims and that these claims, like straightforward empirical claims are, true. Moreover, I must assume that the evidence for these moral claims is such that normal agents can form moral beliefs by responding to it. In other words, I am accepting for the sake of argument that there are reasons for believing moral claims.⁹⁷ With these assumptions on board, we can entertain the possibility that there are morally grounded norms that require us to hold moral beliefs. In the case discussed above, it looked like the risk that a parent’s false beliefs posed for the child’s well being might ground a norm that requires the parent to have true beliefs about

⁹⁷ It is not lost on me that these are controversial assumptions, and though I don’t explore this question in the dissertation, the many elements of the view that I defend would still hold under different metaethical picture. Much of what I say would be inapplicable if there weren’t moral reasons that actually grounded moral truths like “it is wrong to torture cats for fun”. Indeed, it seems like any account of culpable ignorance will resist application if, as non-cognitivist views seem to entail, agents can’t hold false beliefs. In future work, I would like to explore the possibility of defending an account of the epistemic condition that makes fewer metaethical commitments.

her child's allergies. In a similar fashion there might be risks posed by the holding of false moral beliefs that, if sufficiently strong, might ground a norm requiring agents to believe truly. If this were possible, then there would be moral reasons to hold beliefs about certain true moral claims. On such a picture, belief norms requiring moral beliefs might be part of morality, after all. These norms would hold over and above any purely epistemic belief norms that might require the same belief, which would be based solely on evidential considerations. The question I will focus on in this section is whether these belief norms, which I call *moral belief norms*, are subject to the same worries I raise in section 4.6. First, would we be able to comply with a moral belief norm for the reasons that underlie it (does the modal claim hold for these norms)? Second, do beliefs that are based on the moral reasons underlying the moral belief norm have epistemic worth (does the ideal claim hold for these norms)?

Before answering these questions, I will offer a *prima facie* case for thinking that there are such norms. The first thing to notice is that it follows from the metaethical assumptions I made above that certain considerations count as evidence for moral claims. These considerations bear on the question of whether it is, say, wrong to set a cat on fire for fun and as such count as reasons for that belief. On the assumption that there is an abundance of evidence for the truth of the proposition that it is wrong to torture a cat for fun, it is plausible to think that most agents have a belief norm requiring them to believe it. In effect, this belief norm is no different than any norm requiring us to hold a belief for which there is an abundance of evidence. There is an abundance of evidence that Barak Obama is president and that he was born in the United States, and, given this evidential state of affairs, we should believe that he is president and that he

was born in the United States. Similarly, a norm requiring us to believe that certain moral claims true might be established in exactly the same way as standard belief norms. When there is an abundance of evidence for the truth of some moral claim, and either no or very weak evidence against, then we ought to believe that moral claim. However, this is not the proposal under discussion in this chapter. I am concerned with norms that require us to hold moral beliefs, where the force of the requirement is moral. In other words, I am interested in moral belief norms that are underwritten by moral rather than epistemic reasons.

A *prima facie* case for moral belief norms that are underwritten by moral reasons can be developed as follows. Consider whether there are moral reasons why we should believe that it is wrong to burn a cat for fun, and whether these moral reasons would be weighty enough to justify a norm requiring that belief. It is plain that considerations such as the needless suffering of the cat are *moral* reasons that, in a many cases, would support the claim that it is wrong to burn a cat for fun.⁹⁸ In the terms I utilize above, these are the moral reasons underlying an actional norm that prohibits burning a cat for fun. However, the question here is whether these moral reasons also support a *belief norm* requiring agents to believe that it is wrong to burn cats for fun. An obvious candidate for moral considerations that support such a belief norm is the fact that this action causes the cat severe, unnecessary harm and that false beliefs about the moral impermissibility of burning will presents a risk of realizing these harms. It seems plausible to suppose that the gravity of these moral considerations would support the claim that we (morally) should have true beliefs about the morality of burning cats. I am obviously skirting over

⁹⁸ This claim is qualified, in part, because of cases where burning the cat is the only way to prevent the painful destruction of all sentient beings in existence.

important issues here, but the basic principle to which I am appealing is that moral requirement to have true beliefs can be justified by the risk of having false beliefs, which, if acted upon, would realize serious moral wrongs. A similar principle would hold for the parents of the child with allergies. The risk to the child's well being of having false beliefs about her allergies would justify a moral requirement to have true beliefs about her allergies. The fact that certain false beliefs increase the risk of realizing wrong-making features is a moral reason that for having true beliefs in those instances. Notice, that the risk of realizing moral wrongs is also a moral reason for actional norms, viz. the risk of wrongfully harming or killing a bystander is a (probably decisive) reason not to drive drunk. The proposal that I will consider here is whether moral belief norms that are grounded by risk-related moral reasons can avoid the problems I raised above for other belief norms.⁹⁹

With this picture of morally grounded moral belief norms on the table, I can now consider the first objection. In the previous chapter, I argued that a morally grounded belief norm requiring a parent to believe that her child is allergic to penicillin is problematic because the parent could not comply with the norm for the reasons that ground the norm. In the case of the parent, the moral reasons that seem to justify the norm requiring her to believe that her child is allergic to penicillin are that the child is completely dependent on the parent together with the fact that false beliefs about the child's allergies pose a serious risk to her well being. The seriousness of these moral

⁹⁹ With these brief remarks, I do not claim to have made a convincing case for morally-grounded moral epistemic norms. I want simply to offer a way in which such norms might be defended so that I can evaluate their vulnerability to the objections I raised for other morally-grounded belief norms in the previous chapter. For all I say here, it might be that moral belief norms cannot be grounded in the way that I propose because the reasons do not weigh out in support of a moral belief norm. Although the risk of acting wrongly gives us some reason to think we should believe moral truths, we might think that this reason is not sufficiently strong. For now, I will set this objection to the side.

reasons seems to support the claim that the parent should have true beliefs about her child's allergies, where the normative force of this should is moral. The problem is that these moral reasons are not themselves reasons for believing that the child is allergic to penicillin. They are not considerations that bear on the question of whether the child is allergic. Since beliefs are supposed to be based on reasons for belief, whereas the belief norm under consideration is underwritten by moral considerations involving risk of harm, the parent cannot comply with the belief norm by believing for the reasons that justify the norm. Of course the parent can *bring herself to comply* with this norm by responding underlying moral reasons. She may realize the gravity of her situation and do everything she can to remember what her child's allergies are. But, presumably these actions will simply provide her with evidential reasons to believe that her child is allergic, and it is on that basis that she will for that belief. The risk of harming her child functions as her motivating reason for performing an action. This action provides her with the epistemic reasons for which she believes that her child is allergic. But, the problem is that the epistemic reason on which her belief was based is not coincident with the moral reasons that require her to hold that belief. So far, this is just a summary of the argument in the previous section.

Interestingly, this issue does not seem to arise where the morally-grounded belief norm requires us to believe a moral claim. The thought here is that the *moral* reasons that justify the morality-grounded belief norm might also be reasons for holding the belief that the norm requires us to hold. Return to our moral obligation not to burn cats alive. When we are deliberating about what to believe with respect to the morality of burning cats alive, the relevant considerations are those that bear on the question whether it is

wrong to burn cats alive. As I discussed above, these are considerations having to do with the pointless suffering that the cat will experience. Most people would find that this consideration bears strongly on the question whether it is wrong to burn cats alive, and for many it settles that question and becomes the reason on which their belief is based. But, notice that cat's needless suffering can also be part of the justification for a moral belief norm requiring us to believe that it is wrong to burn it for fun. Having false beliefs about the morality of burning animals for fun presents a risk of realizing the very features of the action that make it wrong, namely the cat's pointless suffering. If it is on the basis of mitigating the risk of causing pointless suffering that we are morally required believe that it is wrong to burn cats, then what follows of someone whose reason for believing that it is wrong to burn cats is the pointless suffering involved? It looks as though, in contrast with the allergic child case, that the same consideration can function both as a reason for believing that it is wrong to burn cats and as a reason for thinking we are morally required to believe that it is wrong to burn cats. The former is true because the pointless suffering is a consideration that bears on the question of the morality of burning cats. The latter is true because allaying the risk of realizing pointless suffering is a consideration that bears on whether we (morally) ought to believe that it is wrong to burn cats. If these two claims are right, then we might conclude that an agent can believe that it is wrong to burn cats for the same reason that grounds the obligation to believe it is wrong to burn them. This is just a direct challenge of the modal claim I raised above as an objection to morally grounded belief norms.

In the case I have been discussing, the reason the agent believes it is wrong to burn cats is the pointless suffering it involves, and the reason justifies the obligation to

believe it is wrong to burn cats is that if you fail to hold this belief, you may actually commit this wrong action. The relationship between the reason the agent believes and the reason that justifies the requirement to believe is closer in the case of moral belief norm, but not close enough to satisfy what I have called the modal claim – agents cannot satisfy the belief norm for the reasons that underlie it. Thus, the modal claim fails to hold even for moral belief norms.

The second criticism that I raised for morally grounded belief norms was that the it failed to comport with the standard ways in which advice is given, when the goal is to get agents to comply with a moral norm. I argued that we would not get agent to comply with a morally grounded belief norm to believe that her child is allergic by pointing to the moral reasons that ground the norm. Instead we bring the epistemic reason for the belief to their attention, and hope that reflections on these evidential considerations elicit the relevant belief. In the case of moral norms, things may seem less problematic on this front. Again, this is because the considerations that are relevant to the question of whether some action is, say, morally wrong, are moral considerations that could also ground or justify the moral belief norm requiring that belief. We might point to the obviously pointless suffering that the cat is experiencing in order to get them to believe that it is wrong to burn it. And it is the *risk* of realizing this suffering that grounds the relevant moral belief norm. Unlike the case of the allergic child, we do not have to change the subject when we are concerned to help agents comply with moral belief norms. It is a moral discussion from beginning to end. This is subject to the same objection I raised above however. The considerations having to do with the risk of realizing the harms, which is plainly a moral consideration, is not the right kind of

consideration to point to. The content of the belief that we are trying to get the agent to form is not about the risks associated with holding false moral beliefs. Such risk-facts do bear on the question ‘whether it is moral obligation to believe that it is wrong to Φ ’, but that is not the question we are trying to get our interlocutors to settle when our goal is to get them to comply with such an obligation. Instead, we point them to considerations that bear on the question ‘whether it is wrong to Φ ’. To point to facts about risk of holding false beliefs is to change the subject. Thus, moral belief norms also fail to capture the standard picture of moral advice according to which it is possible, and typically most effective to comply with a moral or epistemic obligation by pointing to the obligation’s underlying reason.

The third criticism that I raised for morally grounded belief norms is that agents who were capable of basing their belief on the reason that underlies the obligation to form the belief are not believing ‘for the right reasons’, and as such, their belief is not epistemically worthy. It should now be clear that moral belief norms do not escape this criticism either. Imagine that an agent forms a belief that it is wrong to burn cats for fun by thinking about the moral risks of holding the belief that it is morally permissible to burn cats for fun. Perhaps, the person is risk averse to an epistemic fault. She bases her moral beliefs, not on the considerations that bear on the truth of those beliefs but rather on considerations that bear on risk posed by being wrong. In this case, she might think that there is no moral risk posed by believing that it is morally wrong to burn cats for fun if it is in fact morally permissible.¹⁰⁰ But believing that it is permissible does pose a

¹⁰⁰ Of course this risk calculation leaves out the possibility that it might be morally obligatory to burn cats for fun, where this obligation is something like a Kantian direct duty. I set aside this complication, since my point does not depend on the imagined agent being good at such calculations. I am only trying to show how considerations of risk might become the basis for a given agent’s moral belief.

moral risk if it is in fact impermissible. These reflections, however odd, might settle the question for someone who is risk averse and would be the basis for her belief that it is morally wrong to burn cats for fun. The epistemic worthiness of her belief turns on whether there are actually good reasons to form that belief. They are clearly not, since the risk of having false moral beliefs is not a consideration that bears on the question whether some moral claim is true. When the agent forms her belief, she is responding to reasons having to do with the moral risks. But, these are not reasons on which epistemically worthy beliefs would be formed in this instance.

In sum, the class of moral belief norms does not avoid the problems I raised for belief norms in previous sections. Although we might be inclined to think that there are moral obligations to believe moral truths given the moral stakes, there are several important difficulties with an account such as that.

4.8 CONCLUSION

In this chapter I considered the prospects of belief norms for filling in the culpable ignorance thesis. I argued that several standard belief norms like the norm of true belief and the norm of ignorance would yield highly counterintuitive results. I then introduced the dual-basis view, which states that the only belief norms that are relevant to culpable ignorance are those that are also based on moral reasons. I raised two objections to the dual basis view of belief norms. First, given the nature of belief and the ways in which it is possible to form a belief, we cannot form a belief for the reasons that underlie morally-grounded belief norms. This means that agents cannot comply with the norm by responding to the reasons that justify it. This is surely a peculiar feature that calls into question the status of the dual basis view of belief norms. The second objection is that

even if agents could comply with morally-grounded belief norms by responding to moral reasons, they would be doing something wrong epistemically, namely their belief would lack epistemic worth. These two problematic features of the dual-basis view of belief norms, together with the observation that morality is in the business of recommending and justifying actions rather than beliefs, show that morally-grounded belief norms may not be relevant to the culpable ignorance thesis.

Of the several types of epistemic norms that I have discussed in this dissertation, the best candidate for justifying claims that ignorant agents are morally responsible because their ignorance traces to the violation of some epistemic norm is an aim-neutral actional epistemic norm that is justified by moral reasons. This has implications for any view of the epistemic condition of moral responsibility that accepts the ignorant action thesis. In the last chapter, I will bring the conclusions of the last two chapters into contact with the quality of epistemic will view that I introduced in chapter two. Then, I consider the implications of this fusion for the following types of ignorance: ignorance that seems to be based on one's cultural upbringing, ignorance that arises because of deference to a non-reliable authority, and ignorance in really hard cases.

Chapter Five: Application of the New Quality of Will Theory

5.1 INTRODUCTION

5.2 MY VIEW

5.3 IGNORANCE DUE TO PERSONAL HISTORY

5.4 MORAL DEFERENCE

5.5 IGNORANCE AND HARD CASES

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous two chapters, I defended the claim that aim-neutral actional norms are the only type of epistemic norm whose violation can transfer culpability from the agent's ignorance to her subsequent ignorant action. Paradigm examples of these are norms that call for investigation or reflection. In the first part of this chapter, I will bring this result into contact with the view of the epistemic condition that I introduced and defended in chapter two. Specifically, I will examine how my account of culpable ignorance fares when filled in with actional epistemic norms. In the second part of the chapter, I will apply this view to different cases of ignorance. I will discuss ignorance that stems from three different etiologies. In Section 5.3, I discuss ignorance that stems in part from the agent's personal history. I take it as a given, that certain global or local features of a given agent's environment might explain an agent's ignorance of both empirical and moral facts. On the empirical side, consider that 19th century physicians were profoundly ignorant about physiological and psychological facts that are currently well established. It is plausible that this ignorance was not the result of widespread epistemic vice. Physicians of the time simply were not well positioned to form true beliefs about the way the body and brain worked.

Things are even more interesting and perhaps more controversial when the ignorance in question is non-derivatively moral – when the content of an agent's false belief references moral facts in a way that is not obviously parasitic on ignorance of morally-relevant empirical facts. For example, citizens of Ancient Greece were profoundly ignorant about the moral obligations that society and individuals should have

toward women and slaves. I am interested in cases where ignorance is not based on some false empirical belief, such as ‘women and slaves cannot feel pain’ or something similar. For the sake of discussion, we can call this pure moral ignorance. The central question of the chapter is whether purely ignorant agents are morally responsible for actions on that ignorance. I will show that my view entails that in many of the cases I discuss, agents are not morally responsible.

In Section 5.4, I discuss a second class of ignorance, namely ignorance that stems from deference to perceived epistemic authorities. This class of ignorance subdivides. First, an agent might hold a false empirical belief because she deferred to someone who turned out to be unreliable. Second, an agent might defer to someone as to the morality of some action and thereby come to hold a false moral belief. Agents who recognize that some moral issues are profoundly complex may decide to defer to someone who seems to understand better what the stakes are and how moral reflection is best pursued. The question for my purposes is whether such agents can be culpably ignorant and, if so, which actional epistemic norms are relevant to establishing their culpability.

The third and final case of ignorance that I will discuss strikes closer to home both for me and for many readers of this dissertation. In Section 5.5, I take on ignorance that, because of the sheer difficulty of getting things right, persists in the face of deep and prolonged moral reflection and deliberation. To be sure, many moral questions are not so hard – a moment’s reflection reveals that factors, such as a person’s eye color, are simply not relevant to morality. Other moral questions resist easy answers, and our confidence in the answers we come to accept frequently falls well short of certainty. My focus will be on the question of whether certain agent’s ignorance about difficult moral questions is

culpable.

5.2 MY VIEW

In chapter two, I defended a theory of the epistemic condition of moral responsibility that has the following form.

Q2: An ignorant agent is culpable for her false beliefs only if her ignorance is traceable to an epistemic norm violation that occurred because the agent was unresponsive to the reasons that underlie the norm.

This view has two central elements: (a) epistemic norm violations and (b) unresponsiveness to reasons that underlie or support the epistemic norms. When I first introduced this account, I did not offer a complete specification of either the relevant epistemic norms or the kind of reasons that support them. In chapters three and four, I argued that *aim-neutral actional epistemic norms* are the relevant epistemic norm type for any theory of the epistemic condition that appeals to epistemic norm violations. These are norms that require agents to act in ways that have epistemic upshots, where these upshots are supposed to either guarantee that the agent forms true beliefs or diminish the likelihood that she forms a false belief. Obvious instances of such norms include the obligation to conduct investigation and the obligation to engage in reflection. A parent should make sure that a given car seat is appropriate and safe for her child. A doctor should keep abreast of the latest research on drug safety and dosage information. As I argued in chapter three, norms such as these may be underwritten by moral reasons.

In chapter three, I also argued that violations of aim-neutral actional norms can connect the agent to the wrongness of her action *because* these norms are underwritten by straightforwardly moral reasons. The moral reasons that support the obligation to investigate that are also moral reasons that explain why the agent's subsequent ignorant action is wrong. My view is that an agent is blameworthy for an ignorant action when she fails to respond to these moral reasons. A salient relationship is thereby secured between the wrongness of her ignorant action and the agent's reasons-responsiveness. The parent's obligation to check the safety seat is underwritten by the risk of harm to the child. Imagine a parent who is in a rush and fails to check the safety seat. If this omission results in the false belief that her child is secure in the car, and if this omission occurred because she failed to respond to the moral considerations that underwrite her epistemic obligation, then she counts as culpably ignorant on my view. Similarly, the doctor's obligation to study the latest research is underwritten by the risk of harming her patients. If the parent or physician falls short of these epistemic obligations because they are cavalier about the risk of harm that their epistemic failures present, then they fail to respond to straightforwardly *moral* reasons. Just as non-ignorant agents who fail to respond to moral reasons are morally responsible for their witting wrong actions, ignorant agents who fail to respond to moral reasons that underlie actional epistemic norms will be morally responsible for their unwitting wrong actions. In the non-ignorance case, their failure to respond to moral reasons that make the action wrong grounds their blameworthiness for the wrong action. In ignorance cases, the failure to respond to moral reasons comes at an earlier point in time. The ignorant agent fails to respond to the moral reasons that ground some actional epistemic norm and is thereby blameworthy for *that*

action. When the subsequent wrong action is performed on the basis of the resulting ignorance, blameworthiness ‘transfers’ to this ignorant act.

One important feature of my account is that it allows for a degreed notion of moral responsibility. As I presented it in chapter two, the quality of will account of moral responsibility indexes the degree of blameworthiness for wrong action to the degree of moral reasons-responsiveness. According to this view, an agent who fails to respond to really strong moral reasons is more blameworthy for their action than someone who fails to respond to weaker reasons. It is important to highlight this feature since there seems to be an intuitive difference in the degree of blameworthiness between an agent who wittingly does the wrong action and a culpably ignorant agent who unwittingly does the same action. The thought is that the physician who wittingly harms her patients is more (perhaps much more) blameworthy than her counterpart who performs the same action unwittingly. My view can accommodate this intuition. In order for ignorant agents to be blameworthy, they must fail to respond to moral reasons to conduct some sort of investigation or reflection. It doesn’t follow from this view that culpably ignorant agents, such as the negligent physician, are, by virtue of failing to respond to the moral reasons to investigate, just as blameworthy as the evil physician who wittingly harms her patients. Let’s grant that the moral reasons are similar in each case – they both involve harm. Still, to wittingly harm the patient requires a stronger reactive failure. It is entirely conceivable that the negligent physician would never be unresponsive to the degree that the evil physician is. Fischer’s account of reactivity to reasons is instructive here. The negligent physician who would not harm a patient in a possible world where he knew he would be causing harm is still somewhat responsive to harm-based reasons. By contrast, the

witting wrongdoer seems to be resolutely unresponsive to harm-based reasons, since she knowingly chooses to bring about harm.¹⁰¹

Another way of securing the difference between the negligent physician and the witting physician is to claim that the reasons to which they failed to respond actually differ markedly in strength. As I discussed in section 4.7, there are reasons to preserve a distinction between the reasons that make an action wrong and the reasons that make wrong to fail to investigate whether that act is wrong. In the case under discussion, the wrong-making feature of the witting physician's actions is the harm that her patient suffers. The witting physician is simply failing to respond to these reasons. However, the reasons that make it wrong for the negligent physician to fall behind on her journal reading involve the *risk* of harming her patients. It seems plausible to maintain that the strength of these risk-related reasons is partially indexed to the level of risk. If, for example, the physician knows that it is unlikely that a given pile of journals will contain information that will cause her to alter the services and care that she provides, then the risk that she is running by failing to read them is relatively low. Still, she is flouting the moral reasons to investigate when she brushes off her investigative obligations. Her failure to react to these reasons reveals the quality of her will and grounds her blameworthiness for subsequent ignorant action. I contend, however, that the strength of the moral reasons to avoid the risk of realizing wrong actions in this case is low relative to the moral reasons not to hurt her patients. If this is right, then we have the resources to claim that the evil physician who wittingly harms his patients flouts stronger moral reasons than the negligent physician who flouts risk-related moral reasons. This serves as the basis for the claim that, though they are both blameworthy for harming the patient,

¹⁰¹ Fischer and Ravizza, *Responsibility and Control*, Chapter three.

the evil physician is more blameworthy.

There is yet another important feature of my view that I would like to highlight before discussing cases of moral ignorance. An agent who only falls short of a belief norm (i.e. a norm that requires the agent hold a certain belief) cannot be culpably ignorant according to Q2. The conclusion of chapter four was that belief norms cannot be underwritten by moral reasons. Falling short of belief norms underwritten by purely evidential reasons may reflect poorly on the agent *qua* believer, and there may be a sense in which such agents are epistemically responsible – they might be answerable for their belief and called to justify it. However, these epistemic failures do not necessarily reveal any sort of unresponsiveness to moral reasons, specifically, those moral reasons that make the subsequent action wrong. Agents with the utmost concern for forming true beliefs and for complying with actional epistemic norms may still fail to hold false beliefs. According to my view, this ignorance is non-culpable and thus they are not morally responsible for subsequent wrong actions on that ignorance.

With this complete picture of my view on board, we can ‘apply’ it to interesting cases of ignorance. Before doing that, however, it is important to note that this ‘application’ is not as straightforward as one might expect. In order to determine whether an agent is morally responsible for a given ignorant action, one must first establish the existence of a relevant aim-neutral actional epistemic norm. Since these are really just standard moral obligations, establishing their existence amounts to an exercise in first order moral theory. Agent’s need to weigh the relevant moral reasons and determine whether an they are obligated to *act* in an evidence-producing way. Consider the case of the negligent physician. Why think that there is an obligation to keep abreast of the latest

research on the treatments she prescribes? Given the fact that patients are in position of epistemic inferiority with respect to their physician, and that the patient's health outcomes depend in large part on the recommendations and advice that the physician provides, there is at least a *prima facie* case to be made for the existence of an actional epistemic norm requiring the physician to stay current on the latest research. Like any exercise in practical ethics, the conclusions of these reflections should be tentative. To be sure, there are certain actional epistemic norms that will seem more controversial than others, and there may be disagreement about the stringency of these norms. Given the structure of my account, these disagreements will result in disagreements about whether the relevant agents are morally responsible. This is to be expected. It reflects way in which morality and moral obligations are embedded in the epistemic condition of moral responsibility.

It might be objected that having morality and moral claims at the heart of the epistemic condition of moral responsibility is a weakness of my account. The objection might rest on the idea that a theory of moral responsibility is supposed to capture a specific metaphysical relation that obtains between an action and an agent. And indeed, every account of the control condition of moral responsibility that has been defended in seems untainted by moral premises. For example, we can figure out whether an agent meets Fischer and Ravizza's account of the control condition without relying on the truth of any moral claims. On their view, an agent is in control of her actions so long as the action issues from a reasons-responsive mechanism that is the agent's own.¹⁰² According to an standard incompatibilist accounts of control, an agent is in control of an action just when that action is manifested by the special power of agent causation, which rules out

¹⁰² Fischer and Ravizza, *Responsibility and Control*.

causal determinism. In both of these cases, the explicated notion of does not imply the truth of any particular moral claims at all. Another way of putting this worry is that while morality and moral reasons must be marshaled in order to determine the moral valence of a given agent's action, morality and moral reasons need not be marshaled in order to connect the action to the agent in a way that makes her morally responsible. This latter question is metaphysical, not moral.

In response to this worry, I will merely point out that the control condition of moral responsibility, which is the target for Fischer and Ravizza and many others, is but one necessary condition of moral responsibility. The epistemic condition is another. That one might be able to defend an account of the control condition without relying on premises that have moral content does not entail that the epistemic condition is similarly devoid of moral content. Being in control of an action might simply be a matter of standing in a certain metaphysical relationship to the action – it might be the effect of a reasons-responsive mechanism or of agent causation. I contend, however, that the best account of the epistemic condition must include a premise that refers to the aim-neutral actional norms that I discuss above, and these norms are straightforward moral norms. A view such as mine should not be ruled out by some antecedent classification of moral responsibility as a purely metaphysical inquiry. Indeed, openness to this possibility is forced upon us after seeing the inadequacies of attributionism, the early benighting views, and certain strands of volitionism, all of which do not to rely on moral obligations in order to establish that an agent is culpably ignorant.

5.3 IGNORANCE DUE TO PERSONAL HISTORY

The issue I will discuss in this section is a familiar one. It involves the question of whether a person's historical circumstances render her non-culpably ignorant. There are two kinds of case for which this question is posed. First, we might question whether an agent is morally responsible for ignorant actions when they formed their beliefs within a larger historical context that made it very difficult if not practically impossible for the agent to form true beliefs. It is plain that an agent's particular social and historical circumstances have a profound effect on the particular beliefs that an agent will form. As I mentioned above, a doctor who practiced medicine in the 19th century is almost certain to have had false beliefs about certain important medical facts. George Washington's physicians, who were the among the best in the world at the time, practiced bloodletting, which was supposed to rid sick individuals of disease factors residing in the blood. Shortly before he died, Washington's physicians removed 82 ounces of his blood (about half Washington's total blood volume), which they considered an appropriate treatment for his throat infection.¹⁰³ Draining this amount of blood likely contributed to his death soon afterwards. The explanation that we might give for a given 19th century physician's ignorance about the safety and efficacy of certain treatments would involve reference to general historical features that, presumably, would have led others to be ignorant as well.

The same sort of widely held ignorance might obtain with respect to straightforwardly moral ignorance. An agent may be ignorant about what morality requires or permits where this ignorance is not based on ignorance of morally relevant empirical facts. Aristotle called such non-derivative moral ignorance, "ignorance of

¹⁰³ White McKenzie, *George Washington's Terminal Illness: A Modern Medical Analysis of the Last Illness and Death of George Washington*, Papers of George Washington, n.d., <http://gwpapers.virginia.edu/articles/wallenborn.html>.

universals”.¹⁰⁴ More recently Michael Slote and Michele Moody-Adams have discussed attitudes toward slavery in Ancient Greece.¹⁰⁵ Moses Finley argues that the lack of condemnation of the general practice of slavery suggests that many people in Ancient Greece believed that slavery was morally permissible.¹⁰⁶ It is plausible to assume that their ignorance about the morality of slavery was an instance of widespread non-derivative moral ignorance. As Slote notes, most Ancient Greeks were simply “unable to see what virtue required in regards to slavery”.¹⁰⁷ It is natural to ask whether agents who act on this kind of moral ignorance are morally responsible.

A second way that historical circumstance might affect an agent’s responsibility for ignorant action involves distorting influences that are more local. Perhaps an agent is not in a larger social or historical context that explains her false beliefs. However, her ignorance, either of empirical facts or of morality, may obtain in part due to local factors such as the conditions of the home or the influence of a close friend, relative, or other epistemic peer. We can imagine that someone raised in a family of naturopaths is likely to come to believe that drinking honey cures serious terminal illnesses. An agent who formed her beliefs about the efficacy of allopathic medicine within the context of such a family will in all likelihood doubt the effectiveness of allopathic medicine and laud naturopathic remedies. The role of the larger social context in such cases is not as relevant in explaining the agent’s ignorance, since we can imagine that her false beliefs make her an outlier in her society. The aspects of the agent’s personal history that are relevant in this kind of case involve social units that are smaller than her ‘society’ writ

¹⁰⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. Roger Crisp (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 39.

¹⁰⁵ Michael Slote, “Is Virtue Possible?,” *Analysis* 42, no. 2 (March 1, 1982): 70–76; M. M. Moody-Adams, “Culture, Responsibility, and Affected Ignorance,” *Ethics* 104, no. 2 (1994): 291–309.

¹⁰⁶ Moses I. Finley, *Classical Slavery* (Psychology Press, 1987), 120f.

¹⁰⁷ Slote, “Is Virtue Possible?,” 72.

large. Non-derivative moral ignorance of this locally-induced kind can obtain as well. The murderous Robert Harris, who is cited by Watson in his influential work on this moral responsibility and evil, would be a paradigm instance of this.¹⁰⁸ Of course, his case is complicated, and the reasons why he acted as he did involved much more than just moral ignorance. Indeed, there may be reason to think that he committed his crimes *because* they were wrong, which entails that he wasn't actually ignorant of the relevant moral facts. However, to the extent that his mother and father's example led him to the belief that there was nothing wrong with his actions, Harris has the sort of locally-induced moral ignorance that I am interested in.

There are two real-life cases of this kind of moral ignorance that I would like to note because of their recent prominence in the media. The first is Michael Vick, an NFL football quarterback who participated in the brutal practice of dog fighting. We can imagine that, though most people in United States believe that it is impermissible to fight dogs, Vick was heavily influenced by a particular individual or group of individuals who taught him that that there was nothing wrong with dog-fighting. Indeed, in the fallout of his case, Vick's defenders offered just this kind of explanation for his actions. Another NFL quarterback stated in an interview that dog fighting was common in areas of the rural south and that the dogs were his 'property' and that they were "his dogs; if that's what he wants to do, do it."¹⁰⁹

Another instance of this kind of moral ignorance is found among the members of the Westboro Baptist Church who are infamous for picketing funerals and other events

¹⁰⁸ G. Watson, "Responsibility and the Limits of Evil: Variations on a Strawsonian Theme," in *Responsibility, Character and the Emotions: New Essays in Moral Psychology*, ed. F. Shoeman (Cambridge University Press, 1987), 268–271.

¹⁰⁹ Associated Press, "Redskins Players Defend Falcons Quarterback's Dog Fighting Operation | Fox News," *Fox News*, December 7, 2011, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,274636,00.html>.

with signs whose content is, to put it mildly, inflammatory. Their theologically motivated mission is to spread the message that God hates homosexuality, and He is bringing His wrath down on countries whose culture fails to condemn it. These church members know that their signs cause significant emotional distress to the targets of their protests, but they do not believe that it is morally impermissible to cause such harm. In fact, they believe that God commands them to ‘rebuke’ those who don’t embrace their religious and moral doctrine. Disturbingly, the children of church members are encouraged from a very young age to engage in these protests and to ignore the claims made by many that it is wrong to inflict such blatantly unnecessary emotional distress on complete strangers. Not surprisingly, several individuals who grew up in the church are now adults and leaders of the movement. For my purposes, I am interested, in whether those who grew up in this environment are culpable for believing that it is permissible to cause emotional distress to the families of the dead.

The question for my purposes is this: If an agent acts wrongly or badly on the basis of ignorance that seems to stem from their social situation, is she morally responsible for her wrong actions? In order to bring out the ways in which my view handles these historical cases, it will be instructive to focus on one particular example that has received the most attention in the literature. The relevance of personal history to moral responsibility arises prominently in Susan Wolf’s critique of what she calls *deep self views* of moral responsibility. These views hold, roughly, that agents are morally responsible for actions so long as they accord with the agent’s values¹¹⁰ or higher order desires¹¹¹. Wolf’s Jojo case, which I discussed at length in chapter two is supposed to be

¹¹⁰ Gary Watson, “Free Agency,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 72, no. 8 (April 24, 1975): 205–220.

¹¹¹ Harry G. Frankfurt, “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 68, no. 1

problematic because Jojo is intuitively not responsible for his actions, even though he seems to meet the conditions spelled out by deep self views of moral responsibility. Jojo's carefully controlled environment seems to explain the way Jojo acts as an adult, and, for this reason, Wolf maintains that Jojo is not morally responsible. Before going on to discuss this case in more detail, I should note that Wolf is concerned to focus on the effects of Jojo's moral education and experience on his values and desires rather than his beliefs. But, we can also focus on the moral beliefs held by Jojo. Although Wolf does not explicitly construct the case this way, we can assume that Jojo held the false belief that it was morally permissible to send people to prison on a whim. This further specification of the case is helpful for the purpose of evaluating whether Jojo, given his personal history, is culpably ignorant and morally responsible for his wrong actions. The force of Wolf's intuition and her brief explanation of it seem to apply even on the belief-version of the Jojo case. Consider:

In light of Jojo's heritage and upbringing – both of which he was powerless to control – it is dubious at best that he should be regarded as morally responsible for what he does. It is unclear whether anyone with a childhood such as his could have developed into anything but the twisted and perverse sort of person that he has become.¹¹²

Wolf's reaction to the case of Jojo shows that an agent's personal history might be exculpating. Wolf thinks that the intuition that Jojo is not morally responsible counts

(January 14, 1971): 5–20.

¹¹² Wolf, "Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility," 54.

against certain views of moral responsibility. She targets so called ‘real-self views’ according to which an agent is morally responsible only if her action accords with her higher-order desires (i.e. the desires she desires to have). We are supposed to imagine that Jojo is not conflicted about whether he should act as he does. Since Jojo’s evil actions are perfectly in line with his desires and higher-order desires (he has a second order desire to want his first order desire to imprison people on a whim to be effective), he is morally responsible for them according to the real self view. If our intuition about Jojo is veridical, then this is supposed to show that the real self view is false.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to adjudicate the debate between Wolf and proponents of the real self view of moral responsibility. What I hope to show is that my view affords a distinct and subtler way of thinking about Jojo and cases like it. Jojo is morally responsible for acting from the false belief that it is permissible to imprison his subjects on a whim only if his moral ignorance is culpable. On the view I have been defending in this dissertation, Jojo’s ignorance is culpable if and only if he violated an aim-neutral actional norm by failing to respond to the moral reasons that underlie the norm. There are several norms that seem relevant to the case of Jojo. First, it is plausible to think that there is an actional epistemic norm that requires some degree of investigation into the moral permissibility of our actions or to engage in deep reflection on our beliefs. This actional norm is just an instantiation of the general *prima facie* obligation to perform some action that will reduce the likelihood of performing some other subsequent wrong action. This obligation is also what grounds the physician’s obligation to stay current on her journals. Also, like the physician’s investigative obligation, Jojo’s investigative obligation is *prima facie* and might be outweighed by

other obligations. The idea here is that everyone is under a *prima facie* actional obligation to investigate the moral permissibility of his or her actions. This norm seems like it has near universal application and *may* have been violated in the case of Jojo. Indeed, it is plausible that a more stringent version of this norm applies in Jojo's case given the power that he will eventually have in his country. The fact that the repercussions of his actions will be potentially far reaching raises the stakes for him and, plausibly, increases the stringency of his investigative obligations in much the same way as a doctor who treats thousands of patients has a stronger investigative obligation to stay current than a doctor sees very few.

Another actional epistemic norm that might apply in Jojo's case is one that would call, not for private investigation and reflection, but for the kind of public airing and discussion of his moral views to others. Minimally, we might think he should do this with close associates or other government officials. Less minimally, we might think he should publically engage the citizens of his country in a state-of-the-union-like speech. The social and political nature of this second actional norm raises deep and important issues related that are examined by Allan Buchanan in his work on social moral epistemology.¹¹³ Exploring these issues will take me too far afield, and so I will focus on the first investigative obligation.

Unfortunately for my purposes, Jojo's case is under-described. Since Wolf's concerns were not mine, she did not need to provide a detailed account of how Jojo formed his beliefs. We might imagine two ways of filling out these details that would yield different results for my view. On each of the following stories, I will assume that Jojo is under a general actional norm that requires deep and serious investigation of one's

¹¹³ Allen Buchanan, "Social Moral Epistemology," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 19, no. 02 (2002): 126–152.

moral beliefs. I also assume that this requirement is underwritten by the hazards associated with having false moral beliefs. This characterization of the norm and the reasons that underwrite it are admittedly imprecise, but this imprecision is not a problem for my present purposes. All I am trying to show is how the quality of will view would settle the question of Jojo's moral responsibility under two refinements of the case. Consider the following variants of the original Jojo case:

Diligent Jojo: Throughout the course of Diligent Jojo's tightly controlled education, and while he was watching his father's daily routine, he fit the stereotype of an overachieving and careful student. At each turn, he questioned whether his father was relaying moral truths. Furthermore, he engaged in much independent reflection and investigation about morality and what it requires. In the face of what he recognized as decisions with morally significant consequences, he was careful to take the time to reflect on what he should do. Despite this Jojo adopts his father's moral beliefs.

Casual Jojo: Throughout the course of Casual Jojo's special education, and while he was watching his father's daily routine, he fit the stereotype of a lazy and apathetic student. He never questioned the veracity of his father's education, nor did he engage in any independent reflection about morality. In the face of what he recognized as decisions with morally significant consequences, he was too apathetic to reflect on what his moral obligations were. As a result, he came to adopt, almost wholesale, his father's false moral beliefs.

These two stories are intended to be consistent with the original Jojo story. They merely fill in details about Jojo's moral education. Rather than elicit the reader's intuitions about these cases, I simply want to show how my view would treat them. Let's consider Diligent Jojo first. Whether Jojo is culpably ignorant turns on whether he fell short of an actional norm requiring him to engage in reflection or investigation about what morality requires. Although I stated this norm imprecisely at the outset, it seems clear to me that Diligent Jojo meets this obligation. As described, he is remarkably reflective about his moral beliefs. He questioned his father's pronouncements and did much of his own investigation. Still, given the context within which his reflection and investigation occurred, one might think it unsurprising that Diligent Jojo would come to hold false beliefs about what morality requires. Since he meets the relevant actional epistemic norms, Diligent Jojo does not meet a necessary condition of culpable ignorance. His ignorance, which in this case happens to be non-derivative moral ignorance, is not culpable and he is not morally responsible when he acts on his ignorance.

Before discussing Casual Jojo, I would like to discuss a challenge to my treatment of Diligent Jojo. The challenge is that I get the result that Diligent Jojo is non-culpably ignorant by applying a norm that is not stringent enough. Someone might grant that there is a norm requiring investigation and reflection but object that I have lowered the bar too far. One might even argue that the evidence for this claim is that, despite his efforts, Diligent Jojo remains ignorant of what are obvious moral truths. How can someone who is an assiduous student of morality come to believe that it is permissible to throw people in jail on a whim?

This objection can be easily accommodated. However high one wants to set the investigative bar, one can set it there, and then imagine another case where Jojo satisfied these stricter epistemic norms but remained ignorant of the relevant moral belief. Perhaps we are required to be much more thoughtful and reflective than Diligent Jojo was, especially when the moral stakes are high. Maybe the relevant actional epistemic norm would require us to spend several hours a day engaging in moral investigation and moral discourse with others. Maybe we should enroll in many moral philosophy courses that afford us the opportunity to debate moral issues, write papers, and engage in intense periods of moral deliberation. However high one thinks the bar should be, it seems possible that someone like Jojo might meet this higher bar but remain ignorant about his moral obligations. This version of Jojo, call him “Super-duper Diligent Jojo”, would still fail to meet a necessary condition for culpable ignorance because he met his now very demanding epistemic obligations.

Of course, one might object to the very possibility that Super-duper Diligent Jojo *could* remain ignorant after meeting the more stringent investigative norm. It might be the case that whenever anyone discharges epistemic obligations that are this demanding, ignorance is ruled out as a realistic outcome. If I triple-check whether it is raining outside, I will almost certainly not form a false belief about whether it is raining outside. On the assumption that the situation is the same for moral ignorance, someone who meets the more stringent epistemic norm would not form a false moral belief. If Super-duper Diligent Jojo is still ignorant, then that very fact is evidence that he didn’t actually meet the relevant (highly stringent) investigative norm. If actional epistemic norms worked in a way that the guaranteed that those who met them would have true beliefs, then non-

culpable ignorance of the variety that obtains when agents satisfy their investigative norms but remain ignorant is simply ruled out as a possibility. On this view, Diligent Jojo and Super duper diligent Jojo are ruled out as a possible cases.

In response to this, and by way of defending the analysis of Diligent Jojo I provide above, I want simply to question the motivation for setting the stringency of actional epistemic norms so high. If it is simply to rule out cases of non-culpable ignorance by ensuring that all ignorant agents will fall short of some investigative norm, then the move is decidedly misguided. Recall that the underlying bases for the sort of aim-neutral epistemic norms that are relevant to my view are moral reasons involving the risk of realizing certain wrongs by acting on a given false beliefs. If someone is motivated to rule out cases of non-culpable ignorance because of a sense that there is something troubling about cases like Diligent Jojo, then they have not pointed to a reason of the right kind. Facts about the desired strictness of one's moral responsibility attributions are not the kind of moral consideration that can underlie actional epistemic norms.

If the motivation for thinking that our investigative norms are so strong is to minimize the moral risks that ignorant agents run of realizing certain wrongs, then the response that I just made will not suffice. As we theorize about the stringency of the actional epistemic norms, the risk of realizing moral wrongs is a legitimate consideration. But, why think that the norms should be so strong that they all but guarantee that agent will form the relevant beliefs? This norm seems to be too demanding along several different dimensions. First, by focusing solely on the risk of realizing wrongs, this approach fails to take into account the profound epistemic difficulties faced by

individuals like Jojo. Many people throughout history formed their moral beliefs within a context that is the moral analogue of the 19th century physician. It is conceivable that, for individuals raised in these contexts, no amount of serious moral investigation or reflection would have resulted in the formation of true beliefs. Second, a narrow focus on the risk of realizing wrongs associated with ignorance might lead to such stringent investigative norms that other areas of moral concern might be neglected. There might be strong moral reasons to conduct serious moral investigation, but there are also strong moral reasons to work at a homeless shelter and to provide for one's children. It seems patently implausible to think that our investigative obligations can be so strong that they are incompatible with living a life that is responsive to other moral reasons. More plausibly, we have strong, even quite strong, investigative obligations that do not require actions or plans that crowd out other moral obligations. Notice, however, that for every degree of moderation of these investigative norms, it becomes more likely that an agent will conduct the required investigation and remain ignorant. Given this possibility, individuals with a personal history such as Diligent Jojo's might well be ignorant about the moral permissibility of his actions despite having discharged his obligations to investigate. For this reason, he is not culpably ignorant according to my view.

Casual Jojo differs from his diligent counterpart in that he actually falls short of an epistemic norm. His ignorance results in part because he did not engage in any meaningful moral deliberation or reflection. Before making any pronouncements about his failures, however, we must ask *why* he fell short of these norms. As I described the case, he recognized the importance of moral deliberation and investigation but still could not be bothered to carry it out. On this version, his apathy with respect to moral

deliberation results from a failure to respond to the significant hazards that false moral beliefs presents to anyone who would be affected by Jojo's actions. We might say, following that although Casual Jojo *recognized* the reasons to investigate, he failed to *react* to them by performing the requisite reflections. This failure to respond to the reasons that underlie Jojo's epistemic obligation is precisely what is necessary for being culpably ignorant according to my view. It shows that Jojo's ignorance is the result of a moral, not merely epistemic, failure. In failing to respond to the moral reasons presented by the obvious risks of holding false beliefs, Casual Jojo is relevantly similar to someone who acted wrongly without ignorance - they both fail to respond to moral reasons. The difference is that Casual Jojo's moral responsibility for imprisoning his subjects on a whim is tied to a prior failure to respond to moral reasons that obtained when he failed to investigate the moral permissibility of these actions.

This way of understanding Jojo differs from the way that Wolf understands the case in several important ways. Of course, the original Jojo case did not contain the details about his moral education. With these details added, one can plainly see that my view will treat Diligent Jojo and Casual Jojo differently. According to Wolf, however, a different feature is driving the intuition that Jojo is not responsible. She maintains that Jojo is:

“unable cognitively and normatively to recognize and appreciate the world for what it is. In our sense of the term, (his) deepest sel(f) is not fully *sane*.”¹¹⁴

On her analysis, Jojo's upbringing resulted in his lacking the ability to discern right from wrong. Since Jojo is insane, he is not morally responsible. Wolf's analysis of the Jojo case is illuminating in some respects. I do think that it succeeds as a criticism of the real

¹¹⁴ Wolf, “Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility,” 58.

self views that were her targets. Jojo possess all of the structural features that are sufficient for morally responsibility according to the real self views. The case of Jojo exposes a vulnerability in these views, but in shoring up the real self view with the sanity requirement, Wolf fails to notice that the explanation for Jojo's ignorance might be based on his failure to conduct the requisite moral investigation and reflection rather than his inability to discern right from wrong. Of course, he might fail to conduct this investigation *because* he is insane. But, as the case of Diligent Jojo helpfully brings out, profound moral ignorance is compatible with the kind of purposeful and planned study of which an insane person might not be capable. When an agent like Jojo holds false beliefs, my view helpfully shifts our focus to a different, though no less important, explanation. The effect of shifting this focus is that it offers a subtler and deeper analysis of agents whose beliefs are affected by their personal history, not because their historical circumstances rendered them insane, but, rather, because their historical circumstances provided significant epistemic challenges.

Someone might object that the application of my view to Casual Jojo works only because I've stipulated that he *recognized* the reasons to conduct the moral investigation. His failures were not primarily recognitional – after recognizing the relevant moral reasons, he failed to *react* to these reasons by conducting the requisite investigation. As I have constructed the case, Casual Jojo is not ignorant about his investigative obligations or the reasons that he has to investigate. Since issues of culpable ignorance do not arise here, the application of my view seems clear for this case. By failing to react to the moral reasons to investigate (which he recognized), he meets the conditions of my account and would be culpably ignorant and, if the control condition for moral responsibility is also

met, blameworthy for actions on his ignorance. What is unclear is how my view handles a version of Casual Jojo wherein he both fails to meet his investigative obligations and fails to recognize the moral reasons he has to investigate. If Casual Jojo was also ignorant about whether he was under a moral obligation to investigate and reflect about the morality of his actions, then we seem merely to push things back a step. In such a case, we can surely ask whether his ignorance at this earlier stage is also culpable. Many philosophers writing on the epistemic condition of moral responsibility have addressed this potential regress. In chapter one I criticized a version of volitionism that requires the trace to akratic action. On this family of views, Casual Jojo would not be culpably ignorant unless his action could be traced back to a wrongful failure to investigate that was witting. I argued that the volitionist's argument for this position rested on an overly restricted notion of rationality and that it should be rejected.¹¹⁵ Other views avoid the regress by maintaining that despite someone's ignorance about what their aim-neutral investigative norms were, they 'should have known' that they were subject to such norms. This is an unworkable strategy, if the suggestion is that agents are subject to a moral norm requiring them to hold the belief that they are subject to some investigative norm. In chapter four, I argued that belief norms with this structure (a moral obligation to believe that p) are not relevant to the epistemic condition. Since the requirement to trace back to an akratic action is unmotivated and since the appeal to belief norms that require us to believe that we are subject to investigative norms is unworkable, we seem to be without a way of solving the regress threatened by Casual Jojo's ignorance of his investigative obligations.

In response to these worries, I must concede that, according to the view that I'm

¹¹⁵ See Chapter 1.

defending in this dissertation, Casual Jojo must recognize that there are reasons to investigate that he then proceeds to flout. In other words, I am restricting the notion of reasons-responsiveness to reactivity to reasons as opposed to the compound formulation first proposed and defended by Fischer and Ravizza, that includes both recognition and reactivity.¹¹⁶ Since we are concerned with moral responsibility for wrong actions, and since moral responsibility for wrong action turns on the agent's failure to respond to the moral reasons that make the action wrong, the clearest way to establish that an ignorant agent is morally responsible for an action on her ignorance is to show that she recognized the moral reasons to engage in investigation or reflection and she failed to react to them. In these cases, her failure to investigate was not itself an action about which the agent was ignorant. It also follows from such a restricted notion of reasons that a version of Casual Jojo who fails to recognize that he had reasons to engage in moral investigation or reflection would not be morally responsible for his ignorant actions unless his failure to recognize his reasons for investigation was itself culpable. Establishing culpability for *this* failure is also a matter of falling short of investigative obligations. But, these prior investigative obligations would require Casual Jojo to investigate the question of whether he is under an obligation to investigate the morality of imprisoning his subjects on a whim. Importantly, Casual Jojo's failure to recognize that he had an obligation to investigate the morality of imprisoning his subjects on a whim, which I will call his *first order obligation*, is only culpable if he recognized that he was under an obligation to investigate whether he had any first order obligations. I will call this his second order obligation. In other words, he would have had to see that there are reasons to investigate whether he is obliged to investigate the morality of his actions but fail to react to these

¹¹⁶ Fischer and Ravizza, *Responsibility and Control*.

reasons. Having flouted or ignored these reasons, Casual Jojo would not look into the question of whether he is obliged to investigate the morality of imprisoning his subjects and would thus fail to recognize the reasons grounding this proximal obligation. Still, establishing moral responsibility in cases such as this requires a trace to an epistemic failure that the agent recognized. This failure would have to be witting.

Before moving on to discuss another instance of ignorance that might be excusable because of personal history, I would like to adduce some considerations that show that the bullet I am biting with respect to these cases is not a flaw in my theory. I will simply reiterate my earlier claim that simply failing to *recognize* that there are moral reasons to investigate one's moral obligations is not sufficient for establishing blameworthiness for subsequent unwitting wrong action. If we think that Casual Jojo's culpability can be pinned to his failure to *recognize* the reasons to conduct what I've called first order epistemic obligations, we seem to be committed to the view that Casual Jojo simply should have believed that those reasons existed. As I argued in chapter four, there are serious problems with the view that culpable ignorance, and subsequent blameworthiness for ignorant actions, is established merely by showing that an agent should have believed something. I argued that the reasons that underlie belief norms such as this are not moral reasons and that agents who fall short of such a norm by failing to respond to them does not reveal herself to have a poor quality of will. In order to tie the agent to the wrongness of her ignorant action, her ignorance must reveal that she is unresponsive to moral reasons in just the way that a witting wrongdoer does. Tracing her culpability to a failure to respond to the straightforwardly moral obligation to investigate can establish the requisite similarity between the reasons that make her ignorant action

wrong and the reasons that the agent flouts or ignores in becoming ignorant. Since cases of ignorant action that trace to failures to recognize reasons to investigate morality lack this requisite overlap, they do not show that the agent had a poor quality of will. For this reason, it is a *feature* rather than a defect of my view that agents whose ignorance is traced to their falling short of a belief norm they do not recognize do not meet the epistemic condition for moral responsibility.

Having addressed the regress worry, we can see how this sort of analysis would apply to another standard case in the literature concerning individuals from the American ante-bellum south who held false beliefs about how blacks deserved to be treated. Arpaly, Zimmerman, and Rosen have discussed this kind of case,¹¹⁷ and much of what I say here will be consonant with these extant treatments. The racist who believes that it is morally permissible to discriminate against black people is culpably ignorant only of she fell short of the sorts of aim-neutral investigational norms that will be familiar by now. It is certainly possible that a racist who grew up in the antebellum south might hold false beliefs about how blacks deserve to be treated despite meeting her investigative obligations. Perhaps her investigations led to non-veridical beliefs in part because of pervasive racism among her epistemic peers and those with whom she participate in moral discourse. It is also possible that the epistemic ‘starting points’ from which she began her moral investigation greatly decreased the likelihood that even honest and serious consideration of the relevant moral issues would lead her to hit upon what we know to be moral truth – that race is an irrelevant factor in determining what we owe to each other morally. Her belief that it is permissible to discriminate against black people

¹¹⁷ Arpaly, *Merit, Meaning, and Human Bondage*; M. J. Zimmerman, “Moral Responsibility and Ignorance,” *Ethics* 107, no. 3 (1997): 410–426; Rosen, “Skepticism About Moral Responsibility.”

might have been inculcated in a deep way from early childhood. So long as the relevant investigative norms require actions that do not guarantee true beliefs, agents such as those who lived in the antebellum south might meet them (indeed, they might greatly exceed what is required) but still be ignorant about what morality requires. Since they met their investigative obligations, these agents will not be culpably ignorant and will not be blameworthy for subsequent actions on their ignorance.

On the other hand, if someone conducting her epistemic affairs in such an environment did not engage in the investigation and reflection that her epistemic norms require, and if this failure was due to her failure to react to the moral reasons that ground the norms – in this case, the risk of wronging African-Americans by acting on false moral beliefs - then her ignorance is culpable. Thus, this person would be morally responsible for any racist actions on that ignorance.

5.4 MORAL DEFERENCE

Another important class of ignorance involves false beliefs that an agent holds because of deference to someone they perceive to be an epistemic authority. Epistemic deference is a fact of life, and it is attended by many benefits and a few risks. Epistemic specialization is enormously beneficial for obvious reasons. One need only think of how daunting a task it would be to figure out for oneself whether a certain medication is safe or, less consequentially, whether Socrates was really born in 469 B.C.E. Deference to reliable experts is pragmatically advantageous, since it allows us to outsource our epistemic burdens and thereby frees up time and energy for other projects. Intuitively, deference to reliable sources is not problematic from a purely epistemic standpoint.

Many epistemologists accept that testimony, which is particular mode of deference, sometimes results in knowledge.¹¹⁸ For example, when my physician knows that a drug is safe and tells me that it's safe, it seems like I thereby come to know that the drug is safe. This attribution of knowledge seems unproblematic despite the fact that I do not hold the belief for the same reasons that my doctor does. We can suppose that her reasons for believing the drug is safe are considerations that have to do with the properties of the drug itself and its effects on humans. Having deferred to her, my reason for believing that the drug is safe is simply that my physician told me so. Issues having to do with the alleged compatibility of deference and knowledge attributions have been well explored. In this section, I will focus on how, if at all, deference affects an agent's moral responsibility. The class of cases that I am interested in involve agents who act on a false belief that they hold because of deference to someone they, perhaps mistakenly, take to be an expert.

Before discussing these cases, I would like to introduce two important distinctions. The first distinction is between two ways someone can defer. Epistemic deference can be personal, as when we defer to a particular person. Alternatively epistemic deference can involve the appeal to a document or other source of information, which is the product of a particular epistemic authority or group authorities. Since not much hangs on this distinction – they both involve someone forming a belief on the basis of someone else's say so – I will assume for my purposes that they do not require separate treatments. I raise this distinction simply to make clear that the discussion in this section has wide application.

¹¹⁸ See F. Dretske, *Knowledge and the Flow of Information*, 1983; R. Audi, "The place of testimony in the fabric of knowledge and justification," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (1997): 405–422.

The second distinction is more important, and it does raise interesting philosophical issues. The least problematic kind of epistemic deference involves epistemic authorities on empirical, as opposed to moral, matters. In cases such as the patient's deference to her physician, the content of the belief that is relayed by the expert has no moral content. I will call this kind of deference, *empirical deference*.¹¹⁹ A more problematic and controversial kind of deference involves the appeal to epistemic authorities on purely moral matters. Consider someone who is grappling with the moral permissibility of a certain action and holds no relevant false empirical beliefs. Despite being fully informed about the non-moral facts of the case, the agent may have no inkling as to what morality requires or, as the case may be, what it prohibits. Alternatively, she might be weakly inclined to think that some moral fact obtains, but she may fail to trust this inclination for fear that she might not be thinking clearly. In either of these situations, the agent might seek the counsel of someone who they take to be a moral authority. Subsequently, she may form a belief about her moral obligations solely on the basis of the alleged authority's say so. I will call this kind of deference *moral deference*.

It is important to notice that some cases of empirical deference seem like moral deference because the information that the epistemic authority relays is assimilated into an episode of moral reasoning. An act-utilitarian whose theory of the right obligates us to maximize happiness will have to rely on empirical facts about how much happiness various options will produce. If, against the advice of sophisticated utilitarians, someone is using utilitarianism as a decision procedure, she is likely to find herself deferring to experts about the empirical facts upon which the moral facts supervene. To borrow an

¹¹⁹ I don't mean to be begging any metaethical questions here. If someone holds the view that moral facts are just a species of empirical fact, then they can adopt a more discriminating terminology.

example from Shelly Kagan, imagine that you are concerned about the morality of buying chicken at the grocery store.¹²⁰ Imagine, further, that if your act of buying a single chicken will produce a comparatively low expected utility, you will forego purchasing the chicken on utilitarian grounds. *Prima facie*, it seems to be an open question whether the act of buying a single chicken will actually make a difference. Moreover, a moment's reflection reveals that settling this question is no easy task. Markets are complicated and their responsiveness to demand seems elastic. Quickly feeling overwhelmed by the complicated nature of such calculations, you defer to Kagan who informs you that, given realistic assumptions about the way markets respond to consumer demand, the expected disutility of buying a single chicken is indeed the death of a single chicken. Armed with this belief, you reason that it would be wrong to buy chicken. The deference in this case is non-moral. One simply wants to know the expected disutility of buying a chicken. This is a case of empirical rather than moral deference even though the agent was deferring for the purpose of settling some moral question.

There are two ways in which genuine moral deference might have occurred in that case. First, the agent might have deferred to Kagan as to the truth of act utilitarianism. In this case the content of the transmitted belief is straightforwardly moral – it is the belief that act utilitarianism is true. Second, an agent, perhaps flummoxed or made weary by the incessant demands of moral theorizing and complicated nature of theoretical application, might simply defer to Kagan as to the morality of buying chickens. In this second case, the content of the transmitted belief is also straightforwardly moral – it is the belief that it is morally wrong to buy chicken.

This short taxonomy is important because I will discuss cases of ignorant action

¹²⁰ S. KAGAN, "Do I Make a Difference?," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 39, no. 2 (2011): 105–141.

where the agent's ignorance is traceable to either empirical or moral deference. In what follows, I will be concerned with the question of when deferential agents are culpably ignorant and thereby blameworthy for their actions on that ignorance.

Let's start with empirical deference. My view is that an agent is culpably ignorant if and only if her ignorance is traceable to the failure to react to the moral reasons that underlie the relevant actional epistemic norm. There are some cases where my view applies straightforwardly and yields an intuitively plausible answer. Consider a case of the most extreme deferential negligence wherein an agent defers solely for the purpose of providing the illusion of clean hands. An heir, who is also in charge of making decisions for her sick parent, might knowingly choose to see a charlatan whose medical recommendations are more likely than not to be detrimental to her father's health. Imagine that, on the advice of the charlatan, the daughter forms the belief that spreading honey on her father's melanoma will cure it. Armed with no information to the contrary, the daughter comes to believe in the efficacy of such remedies. Imagine that she acts on this false belief, and the father succumbs to what was an otherwise curable skin cancer. In this sort of case, the daughter knew she was placing her father at increased risk of harm by deferring to a quack. Intuitively, her false belief about the efficacy of honey application for melanoma is non-innocent. In order for my quality of will view of the epistemic condition to capture this intuition, there must be some actional epistemic norm underwritten by moral reasons of which the daughter fell short. One such norm that suggests itself is:

No reckless deference - when serious moral hazards attend the formation of false beliefs, deference to grossly unreliable authorities is impermissible.

In the case of the negligent heir, imagine that the daughter realizes that the charlatan is uncredentialed and has a poor track record. Despite this initial assessment, it is easy to imagine that she comes to believe that the honey remedy will work. The strength of this belief might be attenuated by her recognition that the charlatan is unreliable. But, absent any evidence to the contrary, it is certainly not outside the bounds of psychological possibility for her to form the belief that she should apply this remedy.

The principle of **no reckless deference** would also apply in cases where a company CEO knowingly farms out research into the safety of her company's products to a firm that tends to recommend very permissive standards. If the CEO defers to the findings of this firm and comes to believe that her products are probably safe, then she seems to fall short of the **no reckless deference** norm. Her ignorance would qualify as culpable and she would be morally responsible for any harm that is suffered by the stakeholders.

It is important to note that agents who fall short of this norm are culpably ignorant only if they recognize the reasons not to defer to unreliable epistemic authorities but fail to be moved by them. In the two cases described, we can imagine that the prospect of a windfall inheritance and the increased profit margin weighed heavily in the minds of the daughter and the CEO, respectively. The reason why their falling short of **no reckless deference** needs to be witting is that an agent who fails to *recognize* that there are moral reasons not to defer to unreliable epistemic authorities does not fail to respond to the right kind of reasons. As we saw in the previous section and in chapter four, it is vital for my theory that a given agent's false belief reveals a deficient quality of will. If they are to be blameworthy for the moral wrong they commit by acting on their ignorance, their

ignorance must reflect a moral, not merely epistemic, shortcoming. We might want to say about an agent who simply was unaware of the fact that reckless deference presents serious moral risks that she *should have known* this fact. But, her ignorance of this fact would be culpable only if she failed to respond to moral reasons underlying a different actional epistemic norm that called for her to investigate or reflect about what moral norms of deference there are. If the CEO simply failed to realize that by choosing an unreliable research company she would be increasing risks to the stakeholders, then her culpability for this ignorance must rest on some other epistemic failure, specifically, a prior failure to react to the moral reasons that underlie an epistemic norm requiring her to investigate whether risky deference is morally permissible. On my view, it is certainly possible for an agent to be culpable for this failure to believe that there are reasons to avoid deference to unreliable authorities and, on this basis, we might argue that the CEO is culpable for acting on his false beliefs. However, making this case will require tracing back to a prior moral failure. In the absence of such a trace, we cannot say that the heir or the CEO is culpably ignorant on the basis that each should have known that reckless deference ruled out because of attendant moral risks.

But what about an agent who falls short of **no reckless deference** because she fails to recognize that the person she pegged as an epistemic authority was in fact unreliable? If the decision-making heir simply failed to recognize the charlatan for what she was, then does her falling short of **no reckless deference** entail that she is morally responsible for the harm suffered by her father? Again, her failure to recognize whether the charlatan was unreliable is culpable only if this false belief is itself traceable to the falling short of a different epistemic obligation – one that, perhaps, required her to assess

the credentials and expected reliability of different authorities. Alvin Goldman has argued that there are several different sources of evidence that we can look to in order to discover reliable experts.¹²¹ Goldman suggests, quite plausibly, that novices can investigate an expert's 'track-record', look for evidence of bias, and appeal to consensus. It might be the case that there are moral obligations to look into these sources of evidence before deferring to a putative expert, especially when the empirical issue about which the agent is deferring is being used to make a moral decision. As we saw in the previous section, these moral obligations might be underwritten by the moral hazards associated with false beliefs on these matters. If someone recognized these avenues for vetting potential experts, but failed to respond to them, they increase the likelihood of deferring to an unreliable (non)-expert and coming to believe something that is false. The implications of my view are clear in cases such as this - blameworthiness for ignorant action requires the recognition and subsequent flouting of moral reasons and the wittingly negligent deferential agent seems to meet this condition. However, if an agent failed to see that they had reasons for assessing the reliability of the various experts in something like the way that Goldman suggests, then their false beliefs about the reliability of the expert they choose are not culpable. Simply failing to believe that a given person is an unreliable epistemic authority does not establish that the agent is connected to the wrong-making features of any subsequent ignorant action.

Moral deference raises interesting philosophical issues, even outside of concerns about the epistemic condition of moral responsibility. The most prominent worry, discussed at length by Julia Driver and Sarah McGrath is that there is something uniquely

¹²¹ Alvin I Goldman, "Experts: Which Ones Should You Trust?," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 63, no. 1 (July 1, 2001): 93.

discomfiting about moral deference as opposed to epistemic empirical deference.¹²²

There are several reasons why one might think that moral deference is uniquely problematic. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss these issues in detail, the set of concerns taken at a general level are relevant to cases of moral responsibility in the wake of pure moral deference, and so I will spend some time spelling them out. After briefly discussing one of these concerns, I will go on to show how my view applies to cases of moral deference.

The first concern about pure epistemic deference is that, unlike deference in empirical matters, it is really hard to discern moral experts from non-experts. The educational and credentialing systems in medicine make it fairly easy to identify experts on questions related to health and disease. By contrast, there is no easy or reliable way of identifying moral experts. On the assumption that there are moral facts about which some person or set of persons can develop expertise, it is not clear what life or educational experience is conducive to expertise acquisition. Religious leaders have long been exalted for their moral facility. Community elders are also relied upon for imparting moral wisdom. But, it is hard to judge whether or when this trust is misplaced. McGrath suggests that moral expertise is especially problematic because we lack independent access to the moral facts that would allow us to establish that someone is an expert.¹²³ The only available way, it seems, is to check the moral judgments of an expert against those of our own. There are two serious problems with this strategy. The first is that this approach only establishes the reliability of the moral expert on the assumption

¹²² Julia Driver, "Autonomy and the Asymmetry Problem for Moral Expertise," *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 128, no. 3 (April 1, 2006): 619–644; S. McGrath, "Skepticism About Moral Expertise as a Puzzle for Moral Realism," *The Journal of Philosophy* 108, no. 3 (2011): 111–137.

¹²³ McGrath, "Skepticism About Moral Expertise as a Puzzle for Moral Realism," 128.

that our own judgments are reliable. Showing that our moral judgments are truth tracking is no easy task itself. The second, more serious problem is that this strategy completely breaks down right when it is most needed. We only seek out moral expert in those cases where we are not confident about the veracity of our own judgments. When confronted with a difficult moral issue someone might recognize the need to defer to a moral expert precisely because she is not sure what the moral facts are. This means she is poorly situated to check the ‘qualifications’ of the moral expert in the very instances where the experts are required. This is an interesting problem for moral deference and dealing with it adequately it is beyond the scope of this chapter. What it does reveal, however, is that moral deference may be an overall riskier endeavor than non-moral deference, and for that reason the norms that permit deference might be more stringent. This is an important consideration to keep in mind as we discuss the implications of my view for cases ignorance that is traceable to moral deference. Since the risk of realizing harms is an important moral reason that underlies many of the investigational norms that I have discussed throughout my dissertation, these reflections on the purported riskiness of moral deference are of prime importance.

The application of my view to cases of moral deference is the same, and should at this point be predictable. A particularly reckless kind of moral deference would involve an agent who recognizes the moral hazards associated with false beliefs, but chooses to defer to someone who she suspects will simply tell her what she wants to hear. Imagine that the CEO from the previous case might be concerned about the moral permissibility eliminating their companywide sustainability program. We can imagine that, rather than seek the council of someone who has given a lot of thought to questions

in environmental ethics and our duties to future generations, the CEO defers to someone who was a well-known climate change skeptic and who has a record of dismissing the central issues that concern climate ethicists. For the purposes of seeing how my account would handle this kind of case, we can assume that it is morally impermissible for the CEO to cut her company's sustainability program. If the CEO comes to believe the opposite on the basis of deference to the known climate skeptic and proceeds to cut the sustainability program, she will, by hypothesis, act wrongly. The central question, again, is whether her ignorance about the permissibility of her action is culpable.

This question will turn on whether, in deferring to the known climate change skeptic, the CEO falls short of an actional epistemic norm because he failed to react to the moral reasons that underwrite it. It seems clear that the **no reckless deference** norm would rule out deference to the alleged authority in this case. To evaluate the case, however, it matters whether the CEO recognized that the climate skeptic was biased and potentially unreliable about the morality of sustainability programs. If she did, then by deferring to the skeptic in the face of this recognition, she fails to respond to the moral reasons that ground the **no reckless deference** norm, namely the risk of realizing a moral wrong. According to my view, she would thereby count as culpably ignorant and would be blameworthy for subsequent wrong action. The fact that the CEO recognized that she was increasing the risk of holding false moral beliefs by deferring to the climate skeptic but ignored or flouted these reasons shows that she has an absence of good will.

Alternatively, the CEO might be unaware of the fact that the climate skeptic is an unreliable moral authority. If this is the case, then the relevant question is whether this lack of awareness is itself culpable. How might it be the case that the CEO's failure to

recognize that the skeptic is unreliable reflects on the quality of her will? As we saw in the empirical ignorance cases, we have moral obligations to investigate the reliability of potential experts. These moral reasons are underwritten by moral reasons involving the risk of realizing moral harms. A CEO who recognizes and ignores the moral reasons to vet potential experts fails to meet her investigational obligations and would be culpably ignorant for her failure to recognize that a given putative moral expert was in fact unreliable. Again, in the absence of this trace to a prior witting wrong action, the agent cannot be culpable for holding a false belief – in this case the belief that an unreliable person is a moral expert.

Consider another case of moral deference that yields a different conclusion. Imagine a case of moral deference that occurs only after the rigorous investigation and vetting of potential moral experts. For the sake of argument, imagine that Singer is right, and that it is morally obligatory to donate a substantial percentage of our income to famine relief.¹²⁴ Michel is talking to his neighbor who is an applied ethicist about his charitable obligations and is concerned that he might not be giving enough. On his neighbor's recommendation he reads a couple of philosophy articles on the topic, but still fails to settle the issue from himself. After doing a cursory web search, he realizes that there are scores of articles on this subject and that the arguments seem turn on esoteric metaphysical debates about actions and omissions and seemingly intractable debates about integrity and impartiality. This leaves Michel feeling truly at sea with respect to what morality requires with respect to charitable giving. Michel also discovers that his neighbor holds a distinguished chair in applied ethics at a reputable university (which is how he knew which articles to recommend) and that he has published several articles on

¹²⁴ P. Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1, no. 3 (1972): 229–243.

this very subject. Thus, he decides to defer to his neighbor and comes to believe *contra* Singer that it is permissible to keep much of one's wealth. Assuming for the sake of argument that this is false, and that Singer is right about the stringency of our moral demands, we can ask whether Michel is morally responsible for wrongfully keeping most of his income.

Michel is morally responsible for this ignorant action only if his ignorance is traceable to a failure to respond to moral reasons that underlie an epistemic norm. But, it is difficult to think of an epistemic norm that Michel violates in this case. After all, he thought about the issue on his own for some time, he investigated his neighbor's qualifications, and he did both of these things with a concern for getting things right. I submit that there is no relevant investigational norm or norm of deference that Michel violates. It follows that his ignorance is not culpable and that he is not morally responsible for his failure to donate sufficiently to charity.

At this point, one might object that moral deference of the kind that I've been discussing is never permissible. Given the problems with moral deference that I briefly discussed above, someone might conclude that, as moral agents, we should never defer to putative moral experts. If this is right, it entails both that Michel violated an epistemic norm by deferring to his neighbor and that, on this basis, his ignorance and subsequent failure to donate to famine relief is culpable. My response to this is to simply point out that the only other alternative, namely that Michel just make a guess as to what morality requires (he cannot simply *not* act, since this is, by hypothesis, a morally impermissible omission), has very little to say for it. More strongly, I think that by deferring in this case, he reveals himself to have more concern for morality than someone who just makes

a guess. Moreover, it is not obviously true that there is an epistemic norm prohibiting moral deference. In the absence of compelling reasons to accept such a norm, it seems to me that the intuitive reaction to Michel should stand. Having violated no investigative norm or norm of deference, his ignorance about the morality of famine relief simply is not a reflection of the absence of good will.

As I discuss in the previous section, there is still much interesting philosophical work to be done in order to figure out what the norms of deference are. I have shown how my view would treat cases on either end of the spectrum – some versions of the CEO and the heir obviously violated a norm of deference, and Michel obviously did not. An assessment of how my view would apply to other cases, including much more quotidian cases of empirical or moral deference, would require a much more thorough treatment than I have provided in this chapter. I hope, however, that the work I have done here serves as a helpful starting point for this sort of enquiry.

5.5 MORAL IGNORANCE AND HARD CASES

In this final section of the dissertation I will focus on agents who have false moral beliefs in cases where it is extremely difficult to get things right. One indication that a moral problem or judgment falls into this category is the existence of disagreement that survives prolonged and honest debate. Although the implications of moral disagreement on metaethical questions have received much attention in the literature, its relevance to questions of moral responsibility has been unnoticed. In this section I will argue that the application of my quality of will view of the epistemic condition is rather straightforward. I will also show that the results are surprising from the point of view of certain influential

theories of moral responsibility that are competitors with my own.

For a prime example of the kind of ignorance I am concerned with in this section, let's reconsider Kris, the ethicist from an earlier example. Her views on our moral obligations to give to famine relief are quite developed. Kris has thought about the case from many different angles. She has followed and contributed to the literature on the subject. Although she can feel the force of the considerations raised by philosophers like Singer, she thinks that our moral obligations to give to famine relief, though strong, do not require her to give up very many of the luxuries she currently enjoys. On the assumption that there is some moral fact of the matter in this case is, and on the assumption, which we entertained in the case of Michel above, that something like Singer's view is actually correct, Kris acts wrongly whenever she uses her money to support her relatively luxurious lifestyle. Despite careful and honest reflection, philosophers frequently make mistakes, and Kris is an illustrative example of how such mistakes have real moral upshots. Her false beliefs about our obligations to give to famine relief have survived honest, intense, and protracted scrutiny. They have also survived the airing of her views in various professional forums. Given all of this, is Kris blameworthy for wrongly failing to give the obligatory amount of her resources to famine relief?

The application of my view to this case should be (painfully) obvious by now. Kris' blameworthiness for wrongly keeping money for herself turns on whether her ignorance about what morality requires is blameworthy. It seems clear to me that in coming to form her beliefs about the morality of famine relief, Kris did not fall short of any investigative epistemic norm. However stringent our investigative norms are, Kris

meets them, if anyone does. I find it hard to imagine that the risk of acting wrongly would underwrite investigative obligations so onerous that someone who dedicates hundreds of hours to the task of moral inquiry still fails to meet them. If Kris meets (and, indeed, greatly exceeds) her epistemic obligations, then her ignorance is not culpable and, thus, her failing to give sufficiently to charity is not blameworthy.

It is important to notice that these considerations generalize to most philosophers and probably to almost everyone who has, say, actively participated in an introductory ethics course. Arguably anyone who has given serious thought to the difficult moral issues that populate undergraduate course syllabi and who continues to subject their views to some degree of serious scrutiny meets her investigative obligations and is, for that reason, non-culpable for any ignorance that results. As I have described several times above, the project of establishing the stringency of our investigative obligations is yet another difficult task the field of practical ethics. The project of discovering what these obligations are will have important implications for the epistemic condition of moral responsibility.

Someone might object to my treatment of difficult cases as follows. They might say that what is revealed by the fact that Kris comes to hold her false belief just is the kind of unreceptiveness to moral reasons that typifies the absence of good will. As I discussed in chapter 1, attributionists like Scanlon¹²⁵ and A. Smith¹²⁶ maintain that the judgments an agent makes are a reflection of their practical identity and that it is this notion of practical identity that is central to questions of agency and moral responsibility. The fact that Kris judges that it is permissible to act in a way that is *ex hypothesi* wrong

¹²⁵ Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, Chapter 6.

¹²⁶ Smith, "Responsibility for Attitudes."

reveals that she is not sensitive to the moral reasons that make this action wrong.

Moreover, the fact that her false moral belief survived the intense scrutiny to which it was subjected seems to show these judgments are more strongly linked to the agent's practical identity than other judgments that are more tentatively accepted.

The resources for this line of objection to my treatment of Kris can also be found in Arpaly's quality of will account of moral responsibility.¹²⁷ Her view, which I discussed at length in chapter two, is that agents are blameworthy to the degree that they fail to respond to the moral reasons by virtue of which, we are assuming, failing substantially to give to famine relief is wrong. Since Kris fails to respond to moral reasons, she would be blameworthy on Arpaly's view. Although she suggests that there might be cases where the failure to respond to moral reasons is not indicative of the absence of good will, it is not clear that a case such as Kris' would be one of them.

A virtue of my own account is that, by shifting our focus to morally underwritten epistemic norms, or what I've called aim-neutral actional epistemic norms, we can appreciate the sense in which agents like Kris have laudable, indeed unimpeachable moral concern. Hard cases such as those that make up much of the practical ethics canon afford us the opportunity to see how the holding of false moral beliefs is compatible with a quality of will that is adequate if not admirable. The view of the epistemic condition that I have defended offers the best way of accommodating this datum.

It is instructive to think about Kris in the context of Derek Parfit's observations that "non-religious ethics" at a very early stage in development.¹²⁸ Given that we just haven't been studying ethics in a systematic fashion for very long, it shouldn't be

¹²⁷ Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, Chapter 2.

¹²⁸ D. Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford University Press, 1986), 453–454.

surprising that well-meaning and honest moral inquiry will frequently fail to result in moral knowledge. The question for my purposes is whether, in addition to being ignorant about what morality requires, agents like Kris would also be blameworthy for acting on their false moral beliefs. I take it to be a virtue of my view that it can distinguish between agents who have false beliefs because they do not care about morality from agents who have false beliefs despite caring quite a lot. By linking culpability for ignorance to the agent's responsiveness to moral reasons that underlie her epistemic obligations rather than to their responsiveness to the reasons for belief that are provided by putative moral facts, my view improves upon its predecessors. I say this with all due trepidation of course, since we have been thinking about the epistemic condition of moral responsibility for even less time than practical ethics. If, despite this all this work, the view that I have defended is wrong, I hope that my ignorance does not reflect the lack of a strong concern to get things right.

5.6 OBJECTION

In this last section, I would like to discuss an important objection to the view that I defend and apply in this chapter. Though I don't think it threatens my account, the objection is instructive because it highlights the fact that future work is needed in order to apply my account to actual cases.

5.6.1 Moral inquiry is itself a risk?

Throughout much of the dissertation, I appeal to morally grounded norms that require moral or empirical investigation. One might object, however, that there are certain

traditional moral perspectives that would actually proscribe the sort of moral inquiry that I assumed Jojo and Michel were expected to undertake. Interestingly, this proscription might be underwritten by the same reasons, namely the risk of realizing wrong actions that were presented as the basis for the obligation to investigate. The idea here is that, given the track record of secular moral inquiry, which has yet to yield much consensus, an agent who believed that their traditional or religious moral perspective was correct might view moral inquiry as a threat. A quotidian non-moral version of this worry is contained in the advice given to students not to over think their test answers. It is natural to worry that when the process of coming to the answer is complicated and difficult, further testing and inquiry might lead one away from the right answer. In these cases, further inquiry might actually lead one away from true beliefs rather than towards them. Interestingly, this worry applies more broadly than those who hold traditional moral views. If someone holds a true moral belief, then further inquiry, if it presents the possibility of changing the person's mind, would actually be morally risky. An obvious candidate would be the moral prohibition against torturing human children strictly for fun. If any moral belief is true than this one is, and a norm that required us to scrutinize it might actually lead someone to disbelieve it.

My response to this worry is two fold. First, I maintain that wherever we have reason to believe that further inquiry will lead someone to change from a true moral belief to a false moral belief, then the moral reasons, which I described in chapters three and five, simply don't exist. There just wouldn't be moral obligations to investigate one's moral beliefs if these moral beliefs are in fact true. Of course, the antecedent in this claim is crucial. If some group or tradition has hit on the set of true moral beliefs, then

they would not have a moral obligation to investigate their moral beliefs. If, however, this antecedent is false, then their investigative obligations would hold, and if they wittingly failed to comply with them, they would be culpably ignorant for any false beliefs that result. Of course, these speculative claims about what our actional epistemic obligations are for specific cases are *prima facie* plausible members of the set of true morally grounded epistemic norms. Whether or not these would actually survive the sort of rigorous practical moral theorizing that I don't take on in my dissertation will only be determined by engaging in that theoretical work. Importantly, my uncertainty about whether these *prima facie* investigative obligations are real obligations does not call into question the fundamental structure of my account of the epistemic condition. Since I see this project as distinct from inquiry into what our moral obligations actually are, I am happy to incorporate only those obligations that survive scrutiny.

Second, this objection helpfully illustrates another way in which someone might be non-culpably ignorant. On the assumption that someone who holds traditional moral beliefs is wrong about what morality requires, her ignorance may be non-culpable even though she sees moral inquiry as a threat to her beliefs. Recall that Diligent Jojo failed to have true moral beliefs but was still non-culpably ignorant because he never wittingly failed to meet an investigative obligation. Though his moral beliefs are false, they are not traceable to a witting failure to comply with an epistemic obligation. As such, they are not indicative of a lack of moral concern or poor quality of will. The same thing might be true of those who are part of a tradition that proscribes the sort moral inquiry that features in many of the examples in this dissertation. If they never knowingly fail to comply with an investigative obligation, in the way that Casual Jojo does, then their

ignorance will not reveal a poor quality of will. Thus, an agent who is brought up to believe that she is already privy to all relevant moral truth and who thus fails to conduct any amount of moral investigation will not be culpably ignorant on my view.

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